

# THE Christian CENTURY

*Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.*

## N. T. WRIGHT on **PAUL**

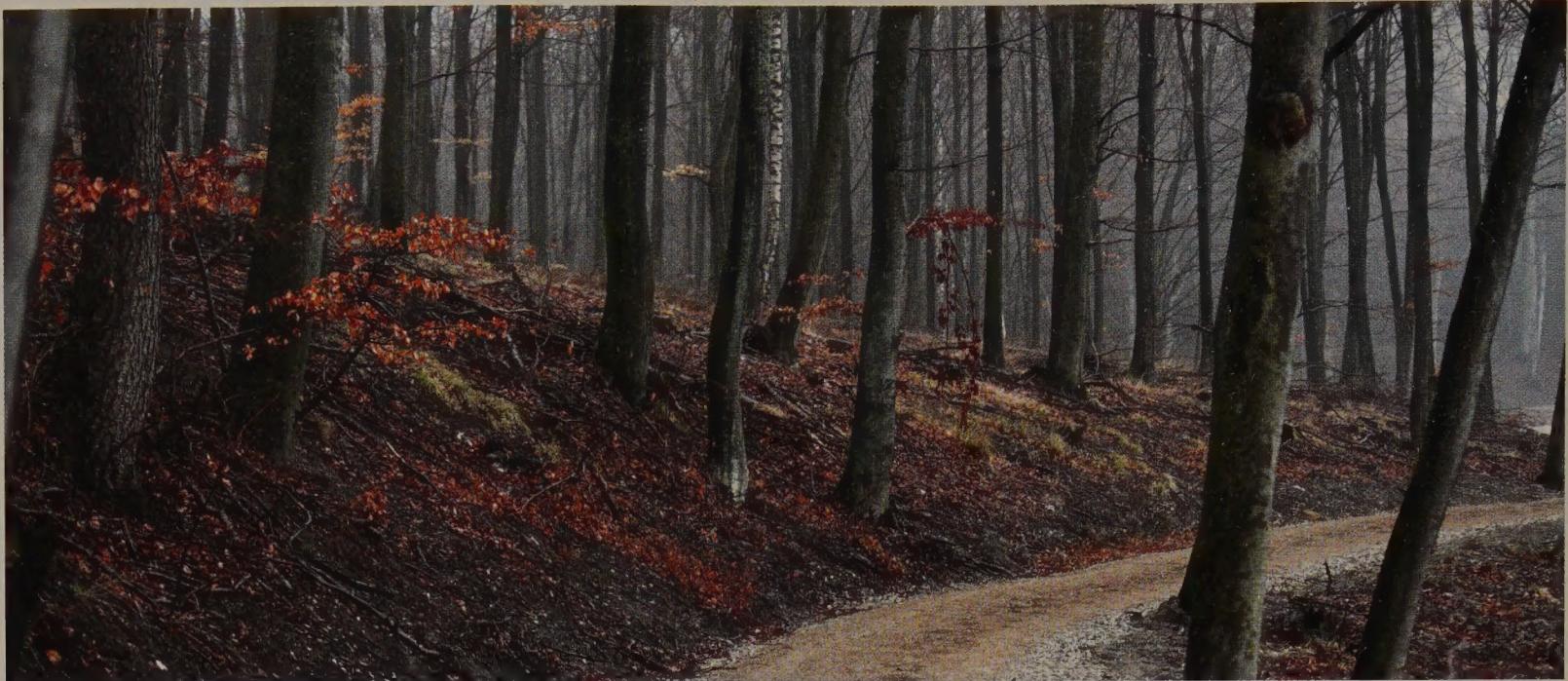
and the One God



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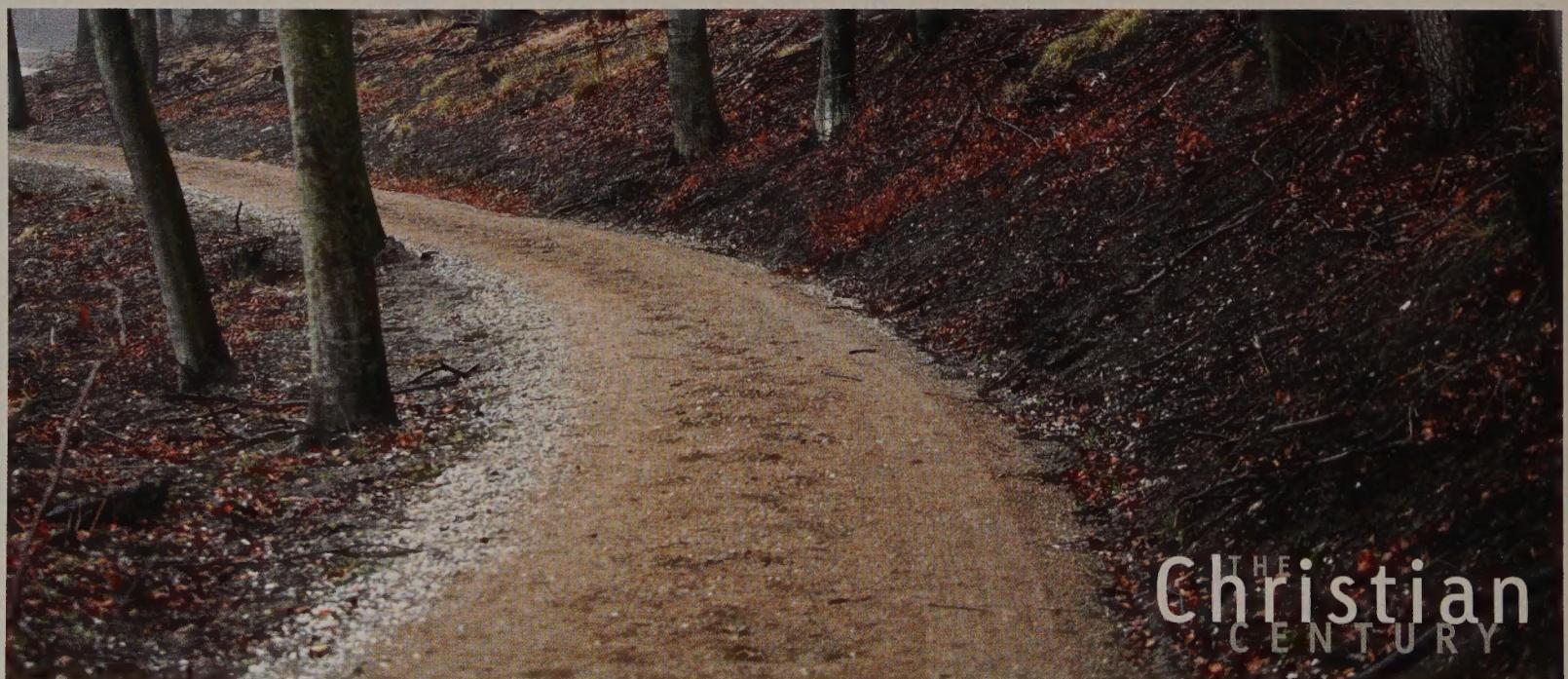


## Read Carol Zaleski @ **Faith Matters**



**“Energy,” William Blake said, ‘is eternal delight.’ But Blake was wrong; energy is a youthful, and therefore transient and corruptible, delight. Eternal delight reveals itself not when we possess energy in natural abundance, but when our energy is depleted and then mysteriously renewed by a source outside ourselves.”**

(from “Renewable energy,” Faith Matters)



THE  
**Christian**  
CENTURY

# Editor's DESK

by John M. Buchanan

## Beauty and thanksgiving

ONE FALL YEARS AGO, my mother sent me a copy of "God's World," by Edna St. Vincent Millay. It was her favorite poem, and she read it every autumn when western Pennsylvania mountains were bursting with vivid red, gold and brown color against the green pines.

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough! . . .  
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag  
And all but cry with colour! . . .  
Lord, I do fear  
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year.

Now I'm the one who reads the poem every autumn. There are no mountains in Chicago, but from my 11th-floor window in the CENTURY office I see two long rows of brilliant red maples in Millennium Park, surrounded by other trees beginning to turn from green to yellow.

The poem reminds me of the beauty and fundamental goodness of the world. "Nein!" was Karl Barth's response when Emil Brunner suggested that there is grace in the natural world. I had a hard time with Barth's argument when the reading was assigned 50 years ago, and I still do.

I'm not the only one. Many people say that they first became aware of the sacred while in nature. I find it impossible to see the brilliant colors of autumn or the snow-covered peaks of the Grand Tetons and not experience something of the Holy. I've never bought the Greek dichotomy between evil matter and good spirit, even when vacation Bible school teachers were telling me the world was a sinful, evil place. I've always loved the world and believe that creation is good. Christianity is not otherworldly. It is worldly, earthy, sensual.

Christian Wiman commented on this topic in an interview with Krista Tippett. "I was brought up with the poisonous notion that you had to renounce love of the earth in order to receive the love of God. My experience has been just the opposite: a love of the earth and existence so overflowing that it implied, or included, or even absolutely demanded, God."

For me, the proximity of American Thanksgiving and Advent evokes an awareness and celebration of the ways God comes into the world: the steady rhythms of nature with occasions of surprising beauty, the life force, the mystery of human birth, the simple fact of our being in the world.

Some of us need help in seeing this. Life is busy, days are full, calendars are crowded. I may miss what's in front of my eyes, not because my eyesight is deficient, but because I'm distracted. I'm grateful for people who see more than I do and slow me down, as does Mary Oliver in her poem "Praying":

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just pay attention . . .

I was in Wyoming recently, and I was startled by the beauty of the Tetons, those high, rugged, snow-capped mountains that seem to shoot up out of the rugged terrain. We were driving out of Jackson Hole when someone in the car pointed out a small herd of elk grazing not more than 50 yards away, almost invisible against the gray-brown trees. We pulled off the road and watched. After a minute or so, a huge bull elk with a magnificent rack of antlers emerged out of the woods. He moved with dignity and grace. I said out loud, "Thank you."

## WHO'S BLOGGING AT CHRISTIANCENTURY.ORG?

Carol Howard Merritt surveys the religious landscape at her blog **Tribal Church**

Steve Thorngate blogs about public life and culture at **In the World**

CCblogs highlights posts from the CENTURY's network of independent bloggers

Various bloggers write for **Blogging Toward Sunday** (on the lectionary) and  
**Then and Now** (on U.S. religious history)

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Cover photo © Massimo Merlini

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# POETRY

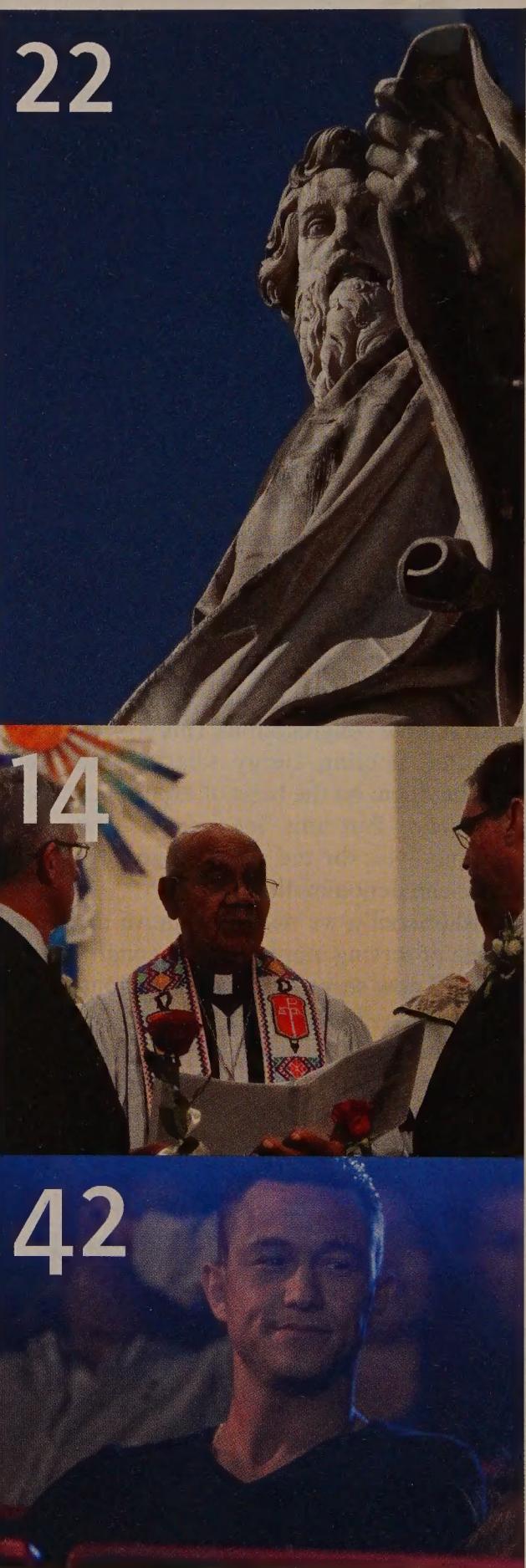
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**SUBSCRIPTIONS & CUSTOMER SERVICE:** Tel: 800-208-4097. E-mail: [christiancentury@cambeywest.com](mailto:christiancentury@cambeywest.com). The CHRISTIAN CENTURY, P.O. Box 429, Congers NY 10920-0429. Fax: 845-267-3478. Subscriptions \$59 per year; \$99 Canadian; \$120 other foreign.

**EDITORIAL OFFICE:** General queries to [main@christiancentury.org](mailto:main@christiancentury.org); 312-263-7510. Letters to the editor: [letters@christiancentury.org](mailto:letters@christiancentury.org) or the CHRISTIAN CENTURY, Attn: Letters to the Editor, 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60603. For information on rights & permissions, submissions guidelines, advertising information, letters to the editor: [christiancentury.org/contact](http://christiancentury.org/contact).

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# Serving the small church

The idea of part-time paid or unpaid clergy serving small congregations is not new ("Churches turn to part-time clergy," Oct. 16). It is an old idea that will work in some locations but not in a wide variety of places.

If the church is going to take seriously the call of Christ to be his witness, it will need a variety of ways to fill small-church pulpits. A response starts with the "larger church" (pun intended) rediscovering a sense of mission to give witness across all places.

My parish began in the early 20th century, when a pastor and his wife sought a call where no one else would go—in northern Minnesota when there were no roads. They were funded by the women's organizations of churches in the Twin Cities. Around the world other churches deal with this problem by supplementing salaries for the pastors of small remote congregations. This is often done by pooling clergy salaries and dividing them on the basis of experience and need. But this idea seems too extreme even for the most progressive American denominations.

Additionally, we need to remove the stigma of serving more than one congregation. I now serve three congregations, and this is my fourth multichurch parish. This ministry is as much a specialized ministry as any other type. Yet for many clergy, the challenge of serving more than one church is beneath their dignity. Seminaries and denominations need to make more of an effort to recruit clergy of high quality to serve in remote areas not because they have to but because they are called to.

The article ignores the fact that even a nonsalaried pastor costs someone something. It costs the parish and it costs the clergy. But part-time paid or unpaid clergy cost the larger church little. We need to recover the idea that giving witness to the Gospel outside of modern-day Jerusalem is a call given by Christ for the entire church, and we

should all be willing to help bear the cost of that witness.

*John Tschudy  
Baudette, Minn.*

## Bonhoeffer and violence . . .

Thanks to Michael DeJonge for reviewing *Bonhoeffer the Assassin?* (Oct. 30). DeJonge's own scholarship proved useful at several points in the final stages of the work Mark Thiessen Nation, Daniel P. Umbel and I did on the book.

Let me take issue here with two of DeJonge's points, beginning with his assertion that the scholarship does not suggest that Bonhoeffer was involved in assassination attempts, and his suggestion that all Bonhoeffer scholarship recognizes his commitment to peace and non-violence. We engage these issues in the book with more detail than DeJonge credits us for (or could acknowledge in a short review). Whether or not "Bonhoeffer scholars" agree, it is certainly the case that Bonhoeffer's deep involvement in assassination attempts and support of violent resistance is widely assumed. Bonhoeffer scholars are not the only ones who have opinions about Bonhoeffer, nor the only ones who make moral decisions based on his example. Because Bonhoeffer's life is often invoked in arguments, it is necessary to state more clearly the implausibility of his involvement in such activities.

Second, DeJonge suggests that our argument boils down to "special pleading." But we go to great lengths to support our reading of the Bonhoeffer narrative and provide evidence from Bonhoeffer's literary corpus for believing one set of reports and not others. How this becomes special pleading is unclear; perhaps it is a case of a reviewer's "special reading" instead.

*Anthony Siegrist  
christiancentury.org comment*

## A common lectionary . . .

If all Christians were doing on Sunday what was gathering in our disparate congregations and having Bible study, any of the alternatives to the *Revised Common Lectionary* proposed in "What's the text?" (Oct. 30) might be interesting. Unfortunately, what those proposing the alternatives miss is that when we read the scriptures on Sunday morning, we are reading them to proclaim the word of God, enlivened by the Spirit, in the presence of the risen Christ, and in doing so we find ourselves joined to all the baptized everywhere.

The ecumenical gains of using the *Revised Common Lectionary* cannot be discounted. These "go-it-alone" proposals only show our North American hubris and individualism run amok. Perhaps lectionary reform should be an ongoing task, but we should consider such reform only with other Christian traditions at the table. We don't need a new law that we all follow a common lectionary. But when we are presented with an astonishing gift, should we not treasure it?

*Mark Mummert  
Houston, Tex.*

Every lectionary is by definition defective because you can't read the whole Bible every time you gather for worship. You can only read snippets, and any snippets bring problems. These problems are easy to isolate, and most discussions of the lectionary revolve around them. The community of the whole church is usually left out of these discussions, along with the wide spectrum of resources that the whole church—in quite remarkable, collaborative checks and balances—was able to develop in the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The problem of alternatives to the *Revised Common Lectionary* is not only the details of the proposals, it's the exclusion of our sisters and brothers in Christ across the whole church.

*Paul Westermeyer  
St. Paul, Minn.*

November 27, 2013

## Entitled to eat

**O**n November 1, Americans eligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—also known as food stamps—saw their benefits go down. Further SNAP cuts loom: negotiations in Congress over the farm bill hinge largely on a disagreement over SNAP funding. Both chambers aim to narrow eligibility for food stamps; the question is how much.

Why is SNAP on the hook? The November 1 cut resulted from the expiration of a temporary increase, which was part of the 2009 stimulus bill. But total spending on food stamps has been going up since 2007—which alarms those who believe government spending has run amok.

This upward trend in SNAP spending was not actively caused by Congress. While some social spending is determined by legislators simply assigning a number, SNAP is an entitlement program. This means that no one who qualifies for benefits can be turned away. Congress still controls the purse, but only by way of adjusting the eligibility standards or the benefits. If more people qualify for the program and Congress does not change the rules, spending naturally goes up.

When the recession hit in late 2007, many people lost their jobs—and some of them became newly eligible for food stamps. So SNAP spending went up automatically. Then the 2009 stimulus bill increased benefits, operating under the same logic as the entitlement program itself: when the economy is bad, people need more help. And helping them not only keeps food on their tables but also helps the economy recover, because food stamps are terrific fiscal stimulus.

While technically the recession has been over for four years, SNAP spending has continued to rise. That's because the economic recovery has been tentative and largely jobless, so people continue to qualify for benefits. The weak recovery also means the economy still needs stimulus. If anything, Congress should be expanding SNAP access and benefits, not cutting them.

Unfortunately, official Washington seems to have all but given up on the idea that spending can stimulate the economy and create jobs. Instead, the goal is simply to reduce deficits, mostly via spending cuts. Since President Obama took office, federal spending has gone down as a share of the overall economy, and deficits are shrinking. This might be good news in a robust economy with low unemployment, but that's not where we are.

The conversation in Congress is animated by ideology: Should the government play a role in providing for the people's social welfare or not? The right wing says no, and the right wing is winning the argument. It has become conventional wisdom that social spending is at best a necessary evil. With the goalposts for acceptable policy often placed entirely to the right of center, the question is now framed as: Should we cut SNAP a lot, or just a little?

Meanwhile, the economy is hungry for more stimulus. And people are just plain hungry.

**Hungry people need the food stamp program—and so does the economy.**

# CENTURY marks

**TRUE RELIGION:** Aaron Graham, pastor of a congregation in the District of Columbia, believes that churches are needed to address foster care needs in D.C. The district has over 1,300 foster children in the system, with 300 waiting for adoption. Through a program called DC127, and in cooperation with D.C.'s Child and Family Services Agency, Graham is trying to get at least half of D.C.'s churches involved. In addition to looking for families who will take in foster children, DC127 is recruiting advocates for foster children, respite homes to give breaks to foster families, mentors and other resources for children in the system. DC127 is based on James 1:27, which says true religion entails caring for orphans (Time.com, November 3).

**JESUS ON THE MOUNT:** In the midst of a civil war, a 40-foot statue of

Jesus was erected last month on a mountain in Syria. It overlooks an ancient pilgrimage route connecting Constantinople and Jerusalem. The project, which took eight years and was stalled by the civil war, was backed by the London-based St. Paul and St. George Foundation, with support from Russian Orthodox churches. The statue, designed to encourage Syrian Christians, was inspired by *Christ the Redeemer* statue in Rio de Janeiro (AP).

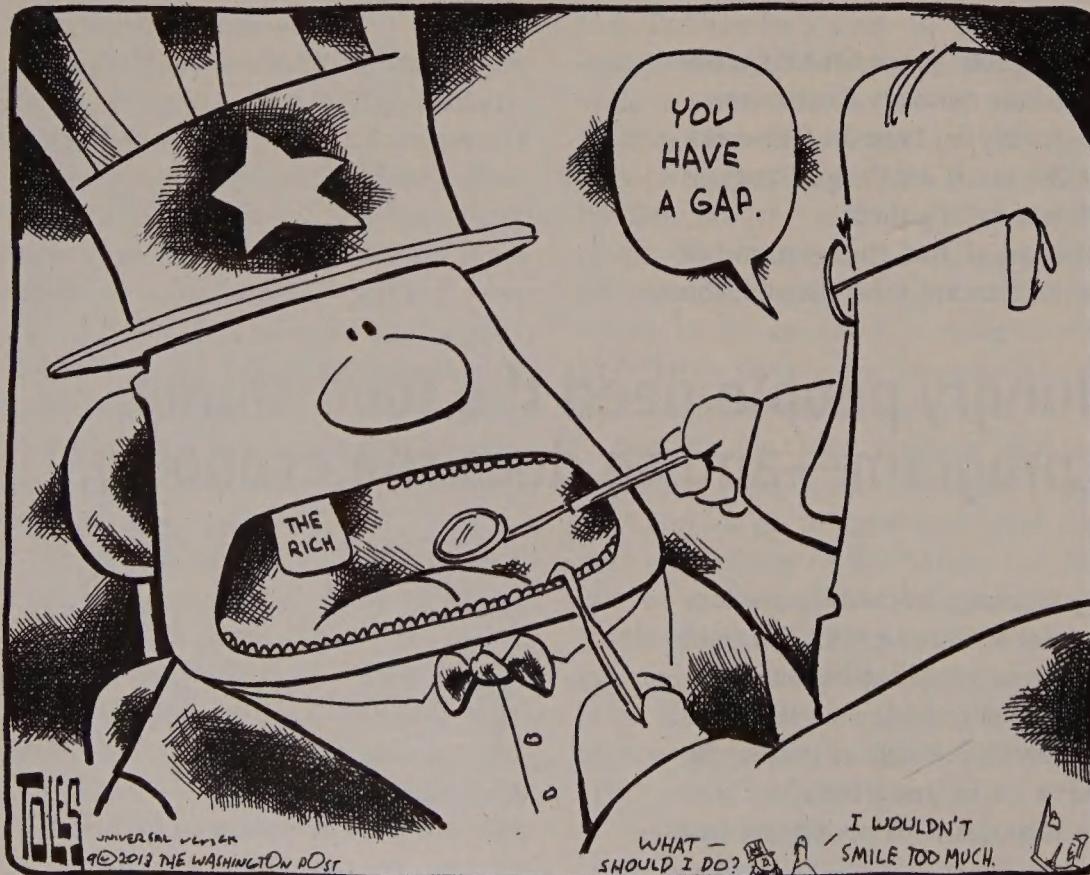
**THE R-WORD:** Graylan Hagler, senior minister of the Plymouth United Church of Christ in the District of Columbia, says he has commitments from about 100 clergy members in the area who will urge the Washington Redskins to change their team name. Sometimes referred to as the R-word,

the team name is something Hagler has been speaking out against for over 20 years. The move to alter the name has been championed by the Oneida Indian Nation's Change the Mascot campaign. Oneida representatives hope to meet with National Football League officials to talk about the need for the name change (*USA Today*, October 23).

**BAR NONE:** Last month the regional council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approved "Church-in-a-Pub" in Fort Worth, Texas, as a synodically authorized worshiping community. "I'm not interested, frankly, in making more church members," Pastor Philip Heinze said. "I'm interested in having people have significant relationships around Jesus. And if it turns out to be [over] craft beer, fine" (NPR, November 3).

**SUNDAY ASSEMBLY:** The London-based Sunday Assembly is bringing its efforts to the United States in November. The group holds assemblies for unbelievers who still want to be part of a congregation to become better persons and serve others. The London group, which draws about 600 people, recently went from monthly to twice-monthly meetings. Cristina Traina, religion professor at Northwestern University, said, "It's very interesting that part of what they seem to miss is what Christians call liturgy—gathering to sing, to say something meaningful about the larger universe, to be inspired and made better in a group, not in your room." She predicts that it will be a "flash in the pan" (Reuters).

**THEOLOGY WITHOUT FAITH:** When Tara Isabella Burton went to Oxford University to study theology, her liberal, secular New York mother



thought her studies would be as useless as speculating about the number of angels that can fit on the head of a pin. Burton argues that the academic study of theology is important not just to people of faith but to those who care about history, humans and culture. "To study theology well requires not faith, but empathy." In her studies, she says, she is able to get inside the minds and hearts, fears and concerns, of those in circumstances vastly different from her own and of people who shape much of the world (*Atlantic*, October 30).

**RELIGIOUS PROFILING:** A diverse group of religious, racial justice, civil rights and community-based organizations sent a letter to the Department of Justice last month, urging it to investigate post-9/11 surveillance practices in New York City that the letter signers say jeopardize the civil rights of Muslims. The appeal follows investigative reports by the Associated Press documenting that New York police have sent hired people to infiltrate mosques, student associations and other places to take photos, write down license plate numbers and keep notes on people because they are Muslim. The group said the surveillance program unfairly stigmatizes Muslims, "who are a law-abiding, diverse, and integral part of our nation and New York City" (ABP).

**REMOTE CONTROL:** When airman Brandon Bryant first began work as a drone operator, he thought he was part of a force for good. After six years of working from a base in Nevada, sitting at a console with vivid and violent scenes of Afghan and Pakistani villages 7,000 miles away, he changed his mind. His views about the morality of the operation changed when he saw a child vaporized on the screen and saw hundreds of people blown to bits. He walked away from a \$109,000 bonus with a severe case of PTSD and a final kill count of 1,626. "The number made me sick to my stomach," he said (*GQ*, October 23).

**HOME AGAIN:** Some 80 Assyrian Christian families have returned to southeastern Turkey, a region they fled

**"I do not believe that we are going to heaven together, but I do believe we may go to jail together."**

— Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in a speech at Mormon-owned Brigham Young University, suggesting that while Mormons aren't genuine Christians, they stand with conservative Baptists in defending religious liberty and traditional morality (RNS)

**"It's not about driving—it's about control."**

— Buthaina Al-Nasr, a Saudi journalist, commenting after she and other women defied the de facto ban against women driving in Saudi Arabia (*Time*, November 11)

for Europe in the 1980s when caught by clashes between the Turkish government and Kurdish separatists. They have been assured protection by the conservative Islamic government of Turkey and the return of land confiscated from the 1,200-year-old Mor Gabriel Monastery, revered by Assyrian Christians around the world. However, life for these Assyrian Christians is still difficult. They are not permitted to have their own seminaries, and they complain about legal and bureaucratic harassment. Between 600,000 and 700,000 Assyrians lived in Turkey prior to the 20th century. Many of them were killed as a result of ethnic cleansing in the last throes of the Ottoman Empire (*Christian Science Monitor*, October 30).

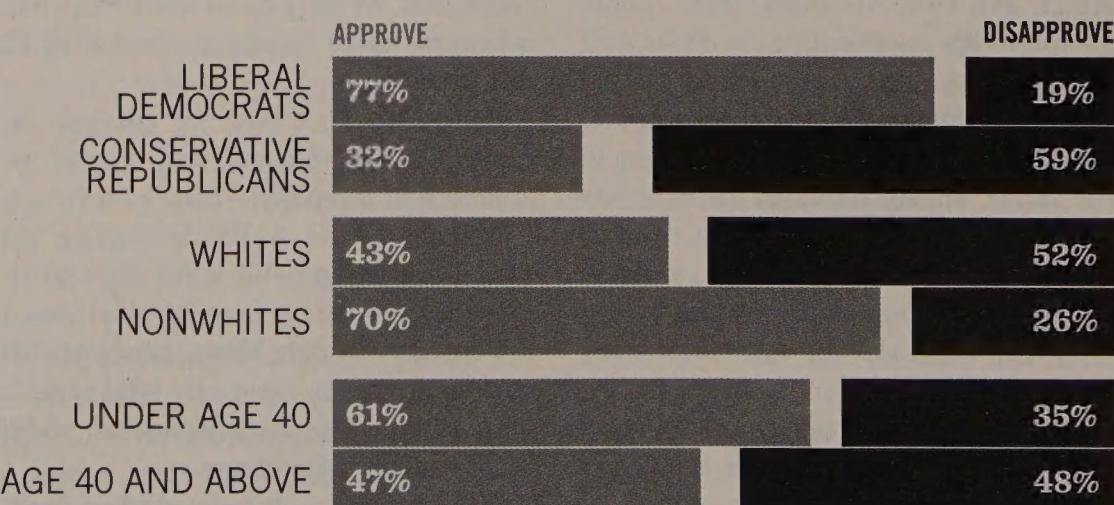
**PRIORITIES:** The percentage of a church member's income given to the church dropped to 2.3 percent in 2011 (the latest year for which numbers are available), down from 2.4 percent in 2010. According to a report by Empty Tomb, a Christian research group, giving has declined for four consecutive years. The only other period of prolonged decline in giving per member was from 1928 through 1934, almost entirely during the Great Depression. Sylvia Ronvalle of Empty Tomb said part of the reason that giving has declined is because churches still treat people as if they are living in "hard times"—even when they are not. "They're hard because people want to take better vacations," Ronvalle said. "They want to get more cars. They want to have more square footage" (RNS).



## IMMIGRATION DIVIDE

SOURCE: ABC NEWS/FUSION POLL

Support for giving legal status to undocumented immigrants:



Why I need Advent

# Season of longing

by Suzanne Guthrie

**ON SPIRITUAL** retreats I often hear people say they love Advent more than Christmas. This does not surprise me, since Christians tend to set apart this season to grow, strengthen and explore the boundaries of the soul.

But I wonder—has the Christian culture lost Advent? Advent's call to simplicity, poverty of spirit, and conversion makes Christmas wondrous and, finally, comprehensible. But is the problem as simple as putting up the tree too soon?

I know I'm a curmudgeon about this. When I was a child, no one in our neighborhood put up a tree before Christmas Eve. Childhood anticipation is Christmas's greatest gift. And there was time! Time to mature in years and in spirit. My parents rejected religion, but they created an atmosphere that allowed their children to enjoy it.

For one thing, there was an Advent calendar, a map of the Holy Land, where Mary and Joseph and the donkey traveled from place to place throughout December. Little cardboard doors opened in the Mediterranean Sea, in the rocks, mountains and sky and along the ponderous road. Along the way we met Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph in his many-colored coat, as well as characters along the couple's journey toward Bethlehem: Herod appearing on a castle balcony, the shepherds abiding in the fields, angels popping up over the rocky plain, the faraway magi alerted to the star. A door of one house opens to the Annunciation, another to the Visitation. The back side of each little door offered a line of scripture, referencing the action taking place inside the picture or a verse from Isaiah—the lion lying down with the lamb, the promise of no more war, the eyes of the blind being

opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped. The last and largest door revealed the cave in Bethlehem with Mary holding the baby and Joseph leaning protectively over them. Christmas!

A well-meaning relative gave us a *chocolate* Advent calendar. We enjoyed the chocolate—but it felt, well, wrong somehow.

Some families baked. We sang, banging out hymns at our level of proficiency.

Eve while we drank hot cider with cinnamon sticks. She opened the Bible and asked, "Do you want kings or shepherds this year?"—that is, did we want to hear Matthew's or Luke's version (another gift from her literary integrity). I know this sounds prudish and ungrateful, but other children experience this, too: the excessive mound of presents on Christmas morning that disturbed me without my understanding why. (My mother and

## The angel interrupts Mary's ordinary life, and interrupts mine.

We sang the heart out of "O Come O Come Emmanuel," garbled at first like any nonsense rhyme. But as we matured the verses opened like the Isaiah doors of the Advent calendar—begging for justice, freedom and the knowledge to trust in "thy mighty power to save and give us victory o'er the grave." These words awakened in me a hope proportional to my growing awareness of worries about the world outside the tenuous safety of childhood. We sang more softly then, like a prayer, "Bind in one the hearts of all mankind."

On Christmas Eve we played our recordings of *Hansel and Gretel* or *Amahl and the Night Visitors* or, finally, Christmas carols while decorating the tree. I loved (and still love) the Christmas tree. I loved my favorite plaything—the crèche—Joseph, Mary, the shepherds and finally Jesus, especially after church late at night. The kings wandered about the house until Epiphany.

My agnostic mother insisted on reading the Bible story to us on Christmas

grandmother went over the top.) But because of Advent, the messages in the little doors of the calendar and the hymns that we sang, I knew this was not what I was waiting for.

Advent still unfolds like an Advent calendar of images—the seas roiling, the moon and stars falling, the end of the world, the Son of Man coming in clouds to judge and, as always, those Isaiah tropes of peace, justice, hope, reconciliation in those ancient familiar phrases. The soul falls onto an empty plane—a new dimension of time. I find myself in a wilderness. John the Baptist appears and calls me to repent, to turn around, inviting me deeper into the unfolding story. Come to the river, wash away your sins, start a new life. Now. Because something is coming! A door opens upon Mary, shelling chickpeas, washing laundry, hauling water from the well or, in subversive medieval art, reading a book. The

Suzanne Guthrie curates the lectionary website Soul-work Toward Sunday at EdgeOfEnclosure.org.

angel interrupts her ordinary life. And suddenly it is *my* life interrupted by the Divine.

I can't help but wonder if part of the spiritual hunger of our time links somehow to a lack of respect for the season of

longing, deep change and dark anticipation. Without Advent, without the soul's journey in tandem with Mary and Joseph, will I even notice the Divine interrupting my ordinary life? How will I discern that gentle star rising upon the horizon ob-

scured by premature holiday glitter? If I do not enter deeply into Advent, how shallow will my transformative journey be toward Galilee, Jerusalem, the cross, the empty tomb, Emmaus and "the ends of the earth"? cc

## My civil religion vacation

# Hallowed ground

by Benjamin J. Dueholm

THE CARNIVAL barker atmosphere that greeted us outside Manhattan's South Ferry subway station was, unexpectedly, just what we'd been looking for. Guides in blue shirts sought to usher my family this way or that toward some more profitable version of the Statue of Liberty experience. A half-dozen kiosks offered us their immodestly priced wares as we wended our way through Battery Park toward the ferry.

We were immune to the commercial blandishments. But we found the hustle and bustle oddly charming. We live in the parsonage of the Lutheran church where I serve as a pastor, and this provides us with all the high-mindedness and meaning we could ask for. Soren, my five-year-old, seems to enjoy the heroic swirl of prophets, apostles, saints and sacraments in which he passes so much of his life. He bows toward the altar when we're in the sanctuary, and he teaches his friends to dip their fingers in the font and mark a cross on their foreheads.

But I can't help worrying that all that reverence will one day be too much. What our summer vacation needed was a place like South Ferry, where the air was fresh and crass and unconsecrated and where the daily impulse to be decent of language and purposeful of action was a thousand miles away.

After arriving in New York and set-

tling in with our friends on Long Island, we went right to the statue—a national destination commemorated in a tidal wave of paperweights, snow globes and foam crowns. On the ferry, I chattered away about the statue. Soren seized on the detail of the broken chain on Liberty's foot. Why was she in chains?

I found myself describing slavery to a child I had rather hoped to keep innocent of that institution for a while longer. When we arrived, we slowly circled the whole immensity of the thing while he

We saw the library's Hooverville tablauex. ("Was everybody dead?" Soren asked. "No, but they were very poor.") We saw the "Chimes of Normandy" carving, sent to Roosevelt by Ernestine Guerrero of San Antonio. She had made it, over the course of a year, from old relief grocery boxes her father had received at the bottom of the Depression. Guerrero wrote,

I know that you have many pretty things, but please accept and keep this piece of work from a poor girl that

## Religiously charged meanings echo across the historical sites.

absorbed the audio tour more attentively than I. Where was the broken chain? He insisted on seeing it. Thankfully, a placard showed us details invisible from our ground-level perspective. There were her chains.

At Hyde Park we visited the Franklin Roosevelt home and library. My son loves presidents, and FDR had by this time become a recurring character in our travels, coming up whenever we crossed a bridge built by Robert Moses. Soren interpreted both men as superheroes, more or less.

doesn't have anything, also to show you how much we admire you, not only as President of the United States but as a man of great ideals and a big heart toward humanity.

A photo taken on the day after FDR's death at his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia, shows the presidential casket and color guard being saluted a final time by two rows of guests in wheel-

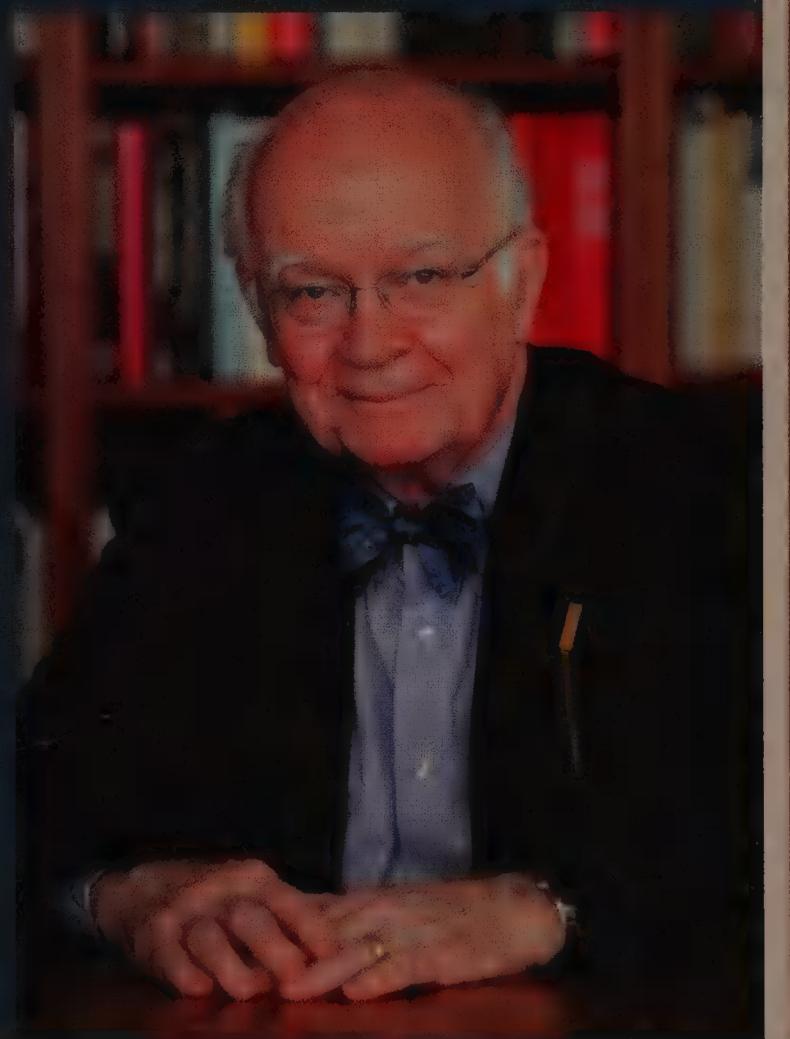
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Benjamin J. Dueholm is associate pastor at Messiah Lutheran Church in Wauconda, Illinois.

# THE MARTIN E. MARTY LEGACY CIRCLE

"Ever since 1952 as a reader and 1956 as a contributor and an editor, I have looked forward to each new issue of the CENTURY to inform, stimulate and challenge me—as it has many thousands. To assure that generations to come can profit from this unique theological journal, I happily lend my name and support to the Legacy Circle and urge you to join me."

—Martin E. Marty



To become a member of the **Martin E. Marty Legacy Circle**, designate a bequest of any amount to the CENTURY from your estate. Call your lawyer and name "Christian Century Foundation" with our IRS tax ID #36-2167022. Then let us know so that we may add you to a growing list of Martin E. Marty Legacy Circle supporters. Thank you!

chairs—a stunning witness to Roosevelt's long advocacy for young people with disabilities.

**A**fter decamping from New York for Washington, my family opted to stay behind while I went to the Gettysburg battlefield with my uncle. The first thing I noticed were the monuments. Gettysburg may be the most religious place in America—more charged with sacrifice and meaning than the National Cathedral, more reverently impressive than any Rocky Mountain sunset. It is like a Gothic basilica in the open air, each regimental marker and state-sponsored memorial an altar at which gratitude and praise may be offered.

I sought out the stelae of the Iron Brigade regiments. This midwestern cohort, led by the 2nd Wisconsin, was disbanded after heavy losses at Gettysburg, where it desperately slowed the Confederate advance on the battle's first day. The 20th Maine is remembered in the woods near the foot of Little Round Top, where it held off a crushing attack on the Union flank on day two. And the 1st Minnesota, sent in to fill a gap in the Union line on the third day, is witnessed by a tall, un-Minnesotan statue of a racing infantryman on Cemetery Ridge.

"We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground," said Lincoln, in a gentle rebuke to the shrines that were about to be built. The place of his address is marked by a mammoth column—the sort of monument that, in the true fashion of religion, tries to capture the illumination of a moment by building masonry to a great height. "Those brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract."

This is religious language. It echoes. We had just seen a facsimile of Roosevelt's first inaugural address. At the top of the typed manuscript he penciled in an introduction: "This is a day of consecration." A couple hundred words later is this typed line: "Plenty is at our doorstep"—even in the Depression—"but a vast use of it languishes." Here Roosevelt crossed out *vast* and penciled in *generous*. In one flick of the wrist, he traded the modern language of industrial production for an Old Testament idiom of liberality in the face

of need. Sanctity, I saw, was harder to escape than I had expected.

Christians have always had a complicated relationship with nations and with the whole project of peace and prosperity. St. Augustine, whose biography I happened to be reading at the time, understood the peace of the Roman Empire as ultimately false when measured against the peace of the City of God. People in my line of work have always struggled to remind our patriotic faithful that the nation, however great, is not to be worshiped. We have imagined that Christianity embodies something both below the nation, in the poor and marginal who have always been left out of the great stories, and above the nation in virtues and hopes that civil religion cannot produce or explain.

Lincoln would later be reasonably accused of making the nation into a sort of church. Augustine's earth was hallowed by the martyrs, while Lincoln's

ground was consecrated by the soldiers who strove for a new birth of freedom.

And yet the bone-deep longings and halfway triumphs of our own bloody national history are not lightly transcended, as one might move from Billy Joel to Chopin. The breaking of chains, literal and figurative, is an event full of religious meaning—as both Old and New Testament insist. The wall-sized painting of Washington crossing the Delaware—"Whoa," my son said when we came into its gallery at the Met—is grandiose and inaccurate in the manner of any icon. Which is to say that it is trying to express a truth that goes deeper than appearances.

In taking this trip with my family, I was trying to escape briefly my own hallowed piece of earth and my own high-minded vocation. Instead we found ourselves on ground littered with relics, hallowed with a liberal mixture of blood—and alive with all the memory and meaning we could bear.

## Advent

Hands can catch  
water from a stream

for drinking or the gathering  
of stones, or the feel of something

cold, pure, elemental.  
Grasping the dark is harder.

Winter's rough air  
slips through outstretched fingers.

Unembracable night  
fills with wisps of wanting,

thoughts of old lovers, the dead  
and dying, falling through space.

Our open palms hold only  
lamentations. We await

the promise of fire, receive only  
darkness,

and bow under it, bow to it,  
the unseen star.

**Donna Pucciani**

## Bishop challenges ban on gay nuptials

**R**etired bishop Melvin Talbert of the United Methodist Church, who shared a jail cell with Martin Luther King Jr. and whose ministries included leadership in national ecumenical bodies, became in late October the first UMC bishop to bless publicly a same-sex union in a church.

Growing numbers of U.S. clergy in the global United Methodist Church, which convenes every four years, have vowed to perform gay weddings in violation of the denomination's long-standing definition of homosexual conduct as "incompatible with Christian teaching." Some clergy are facing charges or are likely to soon.

Talbert declared at the close of the 2012 Methodist general conference that the church's official position "is wrong and evil, no longer [calling] for our obedience." Other bishops urged Talbert to cancel plans to bless a union of two gay men on October 26 in an Alabama church.

Whether Talbert stands to lose his credentials or not is uncertain. The couple was already married September 3 in Washington, D.C., where same-sex weddings are legal.

Joe Openshaw and Bobby Prince, both in their fifties, wanted an additional church ceremony among friends and family in the Birmingham, Alabama, area. More than 100 attended the service held at Covenant Community Church in Center Point, a congregation affiliated with the United Church of Christ, which blesses same-sex unions.

The couple had "a celebration of love," as reported by religion writer Greg Garrison for the website al.com. Talbert signed a certification of marriage not binding according to state law but significant to the couple, according to the United Methodist News Service.

"These are two men, created in the image of God, loyal United Methodists, ser-

vants of Jesus Christ and in love with each other," said the bishop in the ceremony.

In an interview with the news service Talbert said he was "at peace and ready to face the future—whatever that holds—as well as complaints being filed against me." Ministers convicted in a church court could lose their clergy credentials. Church law censures only those who violate church law, not those who simply disagree with church teachings.

The denomination's Judicial Council, which concluded a four-day session October 26 in Baltimore, did not change church policies on gays and lesbians. But the Methodists' highest court did approve a resolution from New York that lauds congregations that "provide for the pastoral needs of same-sex couples" in the denomination.

Talbert suggested that the celebrations, covered by television stations and other media, "will move us toward equality in the church. Little by little, it's going to change."

In the 1970s, Talbert held prominent positions in the Methodist bureaucracy,

including the post of general secretary of the denomination's General Board of Discipleship from 1973 until 1980, when he was elected a bishop and served the Seattle area for eight years. He was then named bishop of the San Francisco area, serving until his retirement in 2000, and also serving as president of the National Council of Churches from 1996 to 1999.

Although a diplomat in wider church circles—he was ecumenical officer for the Methodists' Council of Bishops and president of the Churches Uniting in Christ in the first years of this century—Talbert was outspoken on social justice issues, including gay rights.

As a college student in Nashville, Tennessee, he was involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and helped plan the first student sit-in demonstrations in Atlanta in 1960. SNCC invited Martin Luther King Jr. to join student demonstrations, and he was arrested with them. Talbert spent three days and nights in the same jail cell with King, an experience he said has shaped his life. —John Dart



**BLESSED GAY COUPLE:** After Methodists Joe Openshaw (left) and Bobby Prince were married legally in Washington, D.C., Bishop Melvin Talbert (center) presided over a second ceremony, called a "celebration of love," on October 26.

## Libertarian numbers small but they have clout

The Public Religion Research Institute's annual American Values Survey, released October 29, examines libertarians to try to "pin down a group that doesn't fit on the traditional liberal-to-conservative spectrum," said Robert Jones, CEO of PRRI.

"We were not sure we could find a coherent group that could say they oppose making abortion more difficult and at the same time oppose raising the minimum wage. But we did."

Libertarians are just 7 percent of U.S. adults, but an additional 15 percent of Americans lean toward libertarian views—socially liberal, economically conservative. Seventeen percent of Americans said they lean toward the Tea Party. Most Americans (54 percent) hold a mixture of views, PRRI found.

(The survey of 2,317 U.S. adults was conducted September 21 to October 3, before the Tea Party-endorsed government shutdown.)

PRRI found libertarians are overwhelmingly (94 percent) non-Hispanic white and mostly male (68 percent). They're also young. The average age is 44, while the national average is 47; Tea Party folks' average is slightly older at 51.

On religion, libertarians tilt toward the mainline Protestants (27 percent) and the secular (27 percent say they have no religious identity). Eleven percent are Catholic, 6 percent are identified with a non-Christian faith and 4 percent named another Christian group. (The tally is less than 100 percent due to rounding.)

But libertarians are like Tea Party adherents (chiefly white evangelicals and Catholics) in one respect: politically, they have the capacity to punch above their weight. "There are opportunities for libertarians to play a bigger role in primaries," said Jones, even though only 8 percent of libertarians identify specifically with the Libertarian Party.

One opportunity was Virginia's governor race, in which Libertarian Party candidate Robert Sarvis potentially hurt the Republican candidate, Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli, by siphoning off young white male voters, possibly helping Democratic candidate—and eventual winner—Terry McAuliffe.

"In any race where there's a libertarian, the candidate that stands to lose votes is the Republican candidate. Only 5 percent of libertarians call themselves Democrats, but 45 percent call themselves Republican," Jones said.

The survey used two methods to identify libertarians—self-identification and a spectrum of questions on economic and social issues. Although 13 percent of

tions, they concluded it was libertarian anger with the GOP and pessimism and frustration with government that plowed the ideological ground for the Tea Party.

"We would disagree on this. We just don't see it," said Jones. "These are groups that overlap on some issues but are largely very dissimilar."

Among other PRRI findings:

- There is a notable exception to the generally socially liberal views of libertarians. On legalizing same-sex marriage, 59 percent oppose it. This may reflect that two in three libertarians are men and 63 percent of libertarian men oppose gay marriage; libertarian women were evenly divided on the issue.

- Most libertarians (61 percent) do not consider themselves a part of the Tea Party movement and only one in four Tea Party people would call themselves libertarian.

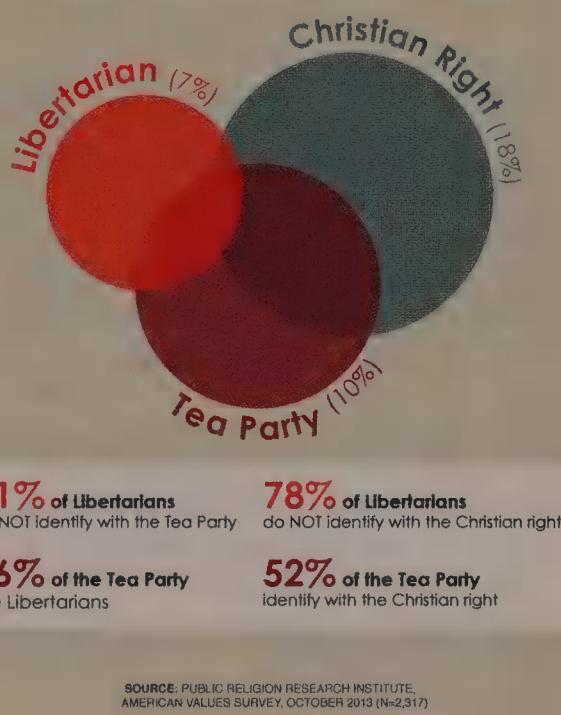
- Only 22 percent of libertarians say they belong to the religious right or conservative Christian movement, which is "overwhelmingly made up of white evangelicals and white Catholics," said Jones. Most Tea Party followers (52 percent) say they are part of the Christian right.

- Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Tex.) is the Tea Party's preferred presidential candidate for 2016 among registered voters, while libertarians lean toward Sen. Rand Paul (R., Ky.).

- While they line up with the Tea Party in opposition to government involvement in the economy, health care and environmental protections, 70 percent of libertarians "favor allowing doctors to prescribe lethal drugs to help terminally ill patients end their lives, and a nearly identical number (71 percent) favor legalizing marijuana."

- Where the Tea Party and libertarians coincide, libertarians often hold a markedly more intense position. Their opposition to the Affordable Care Act is fiercer: 96 percent of libertarians oppose it, compared with 78 percent of Tea Party followers. Similarly, 65 percent of libertarians but only 57 percent of Tea Party followers oppose raising the minimum wage.—Cathy Lynn Grossman, RNS

### The Relationship between Libertarians, the Tea Party, and the Christian Right



Americans called themselves libertarian, "we found the label is fairly loosely held," said Jones. Only 7 percent qualified by the scale of viewpoints that PRRI developed.

Some observers have detected an overlap between the Tea Party and libertarians. David Kirby, a vice president of FreedomWorks, and Emily McClintock Ekins, polling director for the Reason Foundation, wrote for the Cato Institute on the libertarian roots of the Tea Party. Looking at the 2008 elec-

## Baptist pastor resigns amid abuse allegations

An independent Baptist pastor has resigned his church in Georgia after allegations about sexual abuse 18 years ago in Michigan resurfaced on the Internet.

Leaders at King's Way Baptist Church in Douglasville, Georgia, confirmed in a letter dated October 18 that Bill Wininger has resigned after more than 15 years as pastor. Another letter dated October 27 acknowledged that church leaders were aware of recent allegations and charges.

Wininger's troubles started when a woman who is now 25 years old claimed she had been abused by Wininger, stating that it began when she was three at North Sharon Baptist Church in Grass Lake, Michigan. A Facebook group titled Justice for the Victims of Bill Wininger went online October 23 and in the first week grew to 466 members.

"The beauty of the technological age we are in today is that perps cannot hide any longer," Julie Silvestrone, an Iowa resident who studied at Hyles-Anderson College, posted October 25. "We are forming an army that will not be silenced and powerful in-roads are being made behind the scenes."

Hyles-Anderson is an independent fundamentalist school operated by First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, whose former pastor, Jack Schaap, was sentenced to 12 years in prison in March for having sex with a member of the church when she was 16.

The Facebook page carries an online petition calling for a criminal investigation of Wininger. "This is where change begins," an entry reads. "It takes people standing together and collectively being a voice and shouting loud. Change needs to happen, a serial predator of women and children needs to be brought to justice."

The page also contains a testimonial by Bethany Foeller Leonard, Wininger's lead accuser, about what she claims happened to her and the lasting toll it took on her mental and spiritual health.

Police investigated the case when she

first came forward three years ago and no charges were filed, but the investigation was recently reopened after new information emerged concerning other possible victims, according to the *Douglas County Sentinel*.

Leonard says Wininger left her church when she was six, but most people either knew nothing about the allegations or didn't believe them. Church members wept and lamented losing a "wonderful pastor," and a few families even followed him to his new church in Georgia.

When she finally opened up about what happened after years of counseling, she says she discovered she was far from his only victim. The current pastor of North Sharon Baptist Church denied there was a cover-up, telling the *Sentinel* that church officials learned of the allegations two years ago and went

immediately to the Michigan State Police.

Recently a Southern Baptist leader sparked controversy with comments that there is no place in the church for whistleblowers.

"We don't take matters before unbelievers," Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary president Paige Patterson said in a chapel sermon October 15. "This also means that you don't take matters to the press. What goes on in the church of God doesn't go to the press."

Patterson didn't specify what kind of internal church matters he meant, but critics termed his blanket statement ill-advised and potentially dangerous given the Southern Baptist Convention's lack of safeguards for reporting and evaluating abuse allegations that are not prosecuted by police. —Bob Allen, ABP

## Fewer homeschool parents cite faith as main motive

WHEN JENNIFER Pedersen-Giles started to homeschool her son Weston six years ago, it was because he needed a more hands-on environment than what public schools could offer. Now the eighth-grader studies writing, music, art, geometry, literature and world religions from his home in Arizona.

Religion, in other words, had nothing to do with his mother's decision.

She's not alone. According to the federally funded National Center for Education Statistics, the share of parents who cited "religious or moral instruction" as their primary motivation for homeschooling has dropped from 36 percent in 2007 to just 16 percent during the 2011–2012 school year.

"You used to have to be a hero to homeschool," said John Edelson, founder and president of Time4Learning, a curriculum provider for homeschoolers. "You were really going against the mainstream. Your mother-in-law didn't understand it, the neighbors didn't understand it, police would stop you in the middle of the day and wonder what was going on."

As homeschooling slowly becomes more mainstream—3 percent of American students age 5–17 are homeschooled, up from 2.2 percent in 2003—most parents (25 percent) cited the environment of public schools, not religious belief, as the main reason behind their decision to homeschool.

Edelson said the number of homeschool families who do so for religious reasons has not decreased, but the percentage of those who list it as a first priority has dropped as other parents join the homeschooling community for different reasons.

"You go to any cocktail party, church, any group of people and you say, 'I'm in the homeschooling business,' and all these women will jump on it and say, 'Oh, we homeschooled,'" Edelson said.

Brian Ray, president of the National Home Education Research Institute, a nonprofit organization that conducts original research, said years of studies on home education led to its increasing acceptance.

"In the earlier days of the modern

homeschool movement, because homeschooling was such a tiny, tiny minority of the public, parents had to be very strongly committed to what they were doing," Ray said.

Gretchen Buck, administrator of Global Village School, the customizable homeschooling program that Pedersen-Giles uses, said there is more demand for homeschooling as public schools struggle. Many parents do not like the emphasis on standardized tests; others remove their children because of bullying.

Others, like Pedersen-Giles, realize their children struggle when asked to sit at a desk for extended periods.

"By third grade, school was more about production levels with the onus being on the child to adapt to the classroom environment," she said. "[Westen's] individual needs were not being met. It would have taken so little for things to be different, but after exhaustive pleas to teachers, I decided that I would have to create my own change."

This rise in mainstream homeschooling is reflected in curriculum needs, Buck said.

"A lot of people who contact us are looking for an alternative to the very many overtly Christian homeschooling programs that are out here, because that just does not fit in with their values," Buck said. "They're looking for secular homeschooling or just generally nonreligious."

In the case of Pedersen-Giles, her family does not adhere to a particular religion. She often discusses world religions with her son and said he is free to choose his own beliefs.

Edelson said there are generally three types of homeschoolers: those who do so for religious reasons; the "free spirits" who oppose a regimented public school system; and the "accidental homeschoolers" who find their children do not thrive in a traditional school environment.

"Part of it is driven because they're disappointed in the schools," Edelson said. "If we had better schools, if the schools weren't so confused and having trouble with testing and having trouble with budgets—that's one of the things that's fueling the homeschool movement." —Katherine Burgess, RNS

## A rare holiday convergence

It happened last in 1888 and, according to one calculation, won't happen again for another 77,798 years—the convergence of Thanksgiving and Hanukkah.

This year, November 28 is Thanksgiving and the first full day of the eight-day Jewish festival of lights, which begins at sundown the previous night.

For many Jewish Americans, this is not trivial but a once-in-an-eternity opportunity to celebrate two favorite holidays simultaneously, one quintessentially American, the other quintessentially Jewish.

Earlier this year, when the rarity of the synergy began to dawn on American Jews, they began concocting "Thanksgivukkah" mash-ups.

- Nine-year-old Asher Weintraub of Brooklyn, N.Y., invented a "menurky," a turkey-shaped menorah—or Hanukkah candelabra—and has sold more than 1,500 of them.

- Jewish cooks have created recipes for everything from pumpkin latkes (Hanukkah's signature potato pancake) to turkey brined in Manischewitz (the sweet kosher wine Jewish Americans love to make fun of but drink anyway).

- Rabbi David Paskin of Norwood, Massachusetts, cowrote "The Ballad of Thanksgivukkah," which manages to rhyme "latkes" with "religious minorities."

"It's fun, and let me go on record as saying that 'fun' is a good thing," Rabbi Rick Jacobs, head of the congregational arm of Reform Judaism in North America, said of the hybrid holiday.

Jacobs isn't the only Jewish American to note that Hanukkah and Thanksgiving align not just in time, but thematically. They both celebrate religious liberty: the Pilgrims sought religious freedom in the New World and the ancient Jews triumphed over Greek oppressors who had banned the practice of Judaism.

"To me, that is such a beautiful and powerful linkage of the two holidays, and I hope we get to celebrate that as well as cranberries on our latkes," Jacobs said.

Or, as Rabbi Tzvi Freeman recently wrote on the website Chabad.org:



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Thanksgiving is "a narrative about an arduous journey to escape religious persecution for freedom in a new land, the establishment of a democratic charter and the sense of divine providence that carried those refugees through their plight."

The miracle of Hanukkah is set in the 2nd century B.C., when a small band of Jews, the Maccabees, triumphed over the forces of King Antiochus IV.

As the Maccabees rededicated the desecrated temple in Jerusalem, a small quantity of oil, enough to last for only one day, miraculously burned for eight, which is why Jews light the candles on the menorah for eight nights.

The quirk of Thanksgivukkah is that the Hebrew calendar, which follows the sun and the moon, and the Gregorian calendar, where Thanksgiving sits on the fourth Thursday of November, has aligned this year so that the two holidays are on the same day for the first time since 1888, 25 years after President Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a holiday.

As for the long stretch before this will happen again, credit for the calculation goes to Jewish American physicist Jonathan Mizrahi, who explained that the Jewish and Gregorian calendars are drifting apart in such a way as to separate Thanksgiving and Hanukkah for more than 70 millennia. (Others who have also done the math note that the first *night* of Hanukkah—the holiday begins at sundown—will converge with Thanksgiving as early as 2070.)

For many Jews, Thanksgiving and Hanukkah are a much better fit than the holiday Hanukkah often coincides with: Christmas. But for Jews who feel that the Christmas season overwhelms Hanukkah, or even that the relatively minor holiday of Hanukkah gets over-hyped to compete with Christmas, the idea of a Christmas-Hanukkah hybrid doesn't always sit well.

But Thanksgivukkah? It's not going to outlive Hanukkah at Christmas, but while it's here, Jewish Americans are going to make the most of it.

The term was actually trademarked, by Dana Gitell of Boston, who thought it up last year as she drove to her marketing job at an elderly care agency and began brainstorming ways Thanksgiving and Hanukkah could dovetail.—Lauren Markoe, RNS

## Oath to God dropped at Air Force Academy

### AIR FORCE ACADEMY

cadets will no longer be required to say the words "so help me God" when taking their annual honor oath.

Officials at the Colorado Springs, Colorado, campus announced its 4,000 current cadets would be allowed to opt out of the final phrase of their honor code, which they reaffirm each year during their four years of study and training.

"Here at the Academy, we work to build a culture of dignity and respect, and that respect includes the ability of our cadets, airmen and civilian airmen to freely practice and exercise their religious preference—or not," said Lt. Gen. Michelle Johnson, the academy's superintendent, in a statement on October 26.

"So in the spirit of respect, cadets may or may not choose to finish the honor oath with 'so help me God.'" The current oath reads: "We will not lie, steal or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does. Furthermore, I resolve to do my duty and to live honorably, so help me God."

The oath was adopted by the academy's first class in 1959 without the final phrase, which was added in 1984 following a cheating scandal. Honor oaths at other U.S. military academies do not include the word *God*.

The change came after complaints from the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a New Mexico-based watchdog organization headed by Michael Weinstein, a lawyer and Air Force Academy graduate whose family

includes seven people who have attended the academy.

Weinstein has had other successes in rooting out religion from the military. In 2011, he successfully challenged an Air Force nuclear training course that included Bible verses and religious imagery in a PowerPoint presentation.

More broadly, Weinstein has been among the most vocal critics of the religious atmosphere at the Air Force Academy, where he and others say Christianity is given preferred status and inappropriate religious proselytism is rampant.

The decision has exposed a rift among academy alumni, their families and others associated with the military. Comments left on the academy's website, where the decision was first announced, range from sadness to anger to approval.

John Van de Kamp, a member of the class of 1968, wrote that the honor code guided him throughout his life, though he graduated before the addition of the now-optional phrase. "It's a disgrace to bow to political correctness and take God out of the equation even though He guides and strengthens cadets and the Academy's leadership day by day," he wrote.

But someone identifying herself as Kathy from Washington wrote, "This is a compromise that allows the individual cadets to choose. It should be enough to please any sensible person. Go Air Force."—Kimberly Winston, RNS

## Woman sues InterVarsity over firing after divorce

A Michigan woman has filed a wrongful-termination lawsuit against InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, saying she was fired because of her divorce while two male colleagues kept their jobs as they went through divorce and remarriage.

Alyce Conlon worked for the evangelical campus ministry as a spiritual director at the Grand Rapids office from 2004 until she was let go in December 2011, according to a suit in early October in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan.

A spokesman for InterVarsity said no one from the organization would be able to comment on the case, but provided the following statement:

"A vital element of the First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty is the freedom of religious employers to make hiring decisions through the use of faith-based criteria," the statement said.

"As a Christian organization, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's credibility and witness depends on its ability to hire and retain personnel who share and abide by InterVarsity's faith commitments. It is deeply regrettable that a former employee has chosen to challenge this key constitutional liberty."

Conlon was placed on paid leave early in 2011 after informing supervisors that she and her husband were considering separation or divorce.

"During this leave of absence, plaintiff followed each and every requirement of the Separation and Divorcing Staff Policy including counseling sessions and continuing communication with her supervisors as to her progress," attorney Katherine Smith Kennedy wrote in the lawsuit.

According to the lawsuit, during the absence InterVarsity employees contacted Conlon's husband to discuss the marriage without informing her. Despite following InterVarsity's requirements for divorce procedures, the ministry let her go because she was not successful in reconciling her marriage, her lawyer alleges.

The lawsuit claims that she was treated differently than two male colleagues, who went through separation, divorce and remarriage and were allowed to stay on staff.

"When there are significant marital issues, we encourage employees to seek appropriate help to move towards reconciliation," InterVarsity says, according to the lawsuit. When dealing with employment issues and divorce, ministry leaders take into consideration who initiated the divorce, the impact on work competency and funding and the effect on colleagues, students, faculty and donors.

Evangelicals vary on issues surrounding divorce, including in cases of adultery or desertion, as illustrated in a book published by InterVarsity Press, *Divorce and Remarriage*.

Both the Old and New Testament address divorce. "For I hate divorce," says the Lord," states Malachi 2:16. "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery," Jesus says in Matthew 19:9.

InterVarsity operates more than 700 chapters at colleges and universities around the country. The ministry's hiring practices have created disputes over its requirements and standards.

Earlier this year, the University of Michigan temporarily barred InterVarsity from campus for requiring club leaders to sign a statement of faith—a policy the college said violated its antidiscrimination policy.

Last year, Tufts University temporarily barred the group because InterVarsity required its leaders to adhere to its statement of faith. In 2011, the University at Buffalo suspended an InterVarsity group after it asked a gay member to step down as treasurer.

The issue of divorce among employees or applicants has come up at other Christian institutions. A professor at Wheaton College resigned in 2008 because he did not want to share the details of his divorce with school administrators. In 2006, Oklahoma Christian University administrators considered formalizing a policy concerning divorce as cause for possible termination.

—Sarah Pulliam Bailey, RNS

## Briefly noted

■ Illinois was on the threshold of becoming the 15th state to allow same-sex marriage after both chambers of the state legislature approved a bill to legalize gay weddings. The House, which had adjourned in May without passing a Senate bill to authorize marriages, voted for the bill 61 to 54 on November 5. Governor Pat Quinn said he would sign the measure into law, though his office did not say when. Episcopal Bishop Jeffrey D. Lee of Chicago is a longtime supporter of "marriage equality" in the state. Once the law takes effect in June 2014, clergy in his diocese will be permitted—though not required—to officiate at the blessing of these holy unions by using a liturgical rite approved by the Episcopal General Convention in 2012. "The scriptures tell us to testify to what we have seen . . . that extending legal protection and respect to same-sex couples has created stronger, happier households and contributed to the common good," said Lee in a statement. "Justice has been done."

■ In an unusual move, the Vatican has asked the world's bishops to quickly canvas the faithful for their views on topics like gay marriage, divorce and birth control ahead of a major meeting of church leaders set for next fall. But it's not clear how or whether the American bishops will undertake such an effort or if they will only send their own views to Rome. The letter from the Vatican to New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was dated October 18, and it asked that a series of questions be shared "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received" in time for a February planning meeting in Rome. That meeting is to help set priorities for the October 2014 synod—as the meeting of top church leaders is called—on family life. *National Catholic Reporter* first reported the story on October 31 and included copies of the documents.

## Deaths

■ Bishop Thomas L. Hoyt Jr., 72, the presiding prelate of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, who was president of the National Council of Churches in 2004 and 2005, died October 27. "He was an intellectual with a common touch," said NCC president Kathryn Lohre. Hoyt was president of the ecumenical organization when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005, and he helped organize NCC aid to hurricane victims and monitored government assistance to the region. Hoyt was also the NCC's chief spokesperson in church-backed boycotts of Taco Bell in 2004 and 2005 to win rights and greater benefits for agricultural workers. After pastorates in North Carolina and New York, he was ordained a bishop in 1994. Before that he was a professor of New Testament at Hartford Seminary from 1980 to 1994. Earlier, he taught at Howard University School of Religion and Interdenominational Theological Center. He gave the prestigious Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity in 1993 and wrote or coauthored six books.

■ Retired Bishop John-David Schofield, who nearly six years ago voted with a majority of congregations in the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin to realign with the Argentina-based Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, died October 29. A statement by the Anglican Church in North America's website said Schofield, 75, was found dead at home in Fresno, California. Schofield, at odds with the Episcopal Church over the ordination of women and gay clergy and issues of biblical authority, had urged the Central California Valley diocese to disaffiliate and join the Southern Cone. His was the first of five efforts by dissident bishops to lead diocesan leaders and members out of the Episcopal Church. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori deposed Schofield on March 12, 2008, after the Episcopal Church found Schofield had abandoned the communion of the church.

# LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, December 1

1 Kings 2:1–3; Romans 13:11–14; Matthew 24:36–44

**IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA** I often read about a Christian community that has excluded an innocent person or demonized a marginalized group. The writer then juxtaposes this with a pithy saying from Jesus about loving all persons. And there you have it—we Christians are exposed as two-faced and heartless, insensitive to anything but our own proclamations of righteousness.

If you're like me and many others in the progressive, socially aware, justice-minded, post-Christendom community, the criticisms based on these caricatures seem easy to brush off (they're straw figures begging to be knocked down). After all, it's not true that we judge people as they're coming through the door; instead we do everything we can to honor their experience and perspective. We work for inclusion of all persons, and create programs to help provide disadvantaged and isolated people with the means of connection and dignity. We don't hit everyone over the head with the gospel; we honor other faiths and perspectives. Most of all, we do our best to avoid implying that those who do not share our beliefs or practices are cut off from God's grace.

Our polite and careful articulations of faith help us avoid offending those who might be looking for a reason to reject a relationship with Jesus Christ. But does our Christianity have anything that's truly compelling about it? Imagine how Paul's words stirred the hearts of believers in Rome as they wondered if they could remain true to their faith in an empire that was so hostile to their faith and to them. Would a message about accommodating the powers around them have served them as well as the bold exhortation that lifted up contrasting images: life in an oppressive empire and life in God's new day?

As we provide guidance to members of our communities in these complex times, I wonder whether our public articulations of the situations we face are faithful to the ministry of Jesus. We try to give Christians a useful perspective on the legislative quagmires of health care, gun control or budgets; we get caught up in statistics, legal precedents and lobbying powers. We share guidance from our confessions and denominational statements. When we attempt to sway our leaders on policy issues—emissions and the environment, human rights violations or military aid—we avoid painting anyone as wholly bad, point out where we might not be so good and scramble to articulate the dizzying complexity of each dilemma.

But do we articulate a clear, spiritual rationale that encourages individual believers to take a strong position in any of

these debates? Or do we stop short of staking any claim about where Jesus Christ calls us to stand on an issue? When we encourage our members to invite their unchurched neighbors and friends to visit our worshiping communities, we instruct them on how not to offend others with outdated assumptions, how not to sound judgmental or overbearing, how not to imply that there's a certain type of person that we're looking for. But do we teach those same members how to tell a truly inspiring story about what faith in Jesus and life in a community lived out in his name have meant in their lives?

Paul presented a night-and-day scenario to Christians in ancient Rome; there really was no in-between for them. Either they were right about Jesus' message that God wanted their focus to be on living for a world that was yet to come—or they were dead wrong and were risking persecution and worse for the sake of a lie. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is speaking to people who are desperate for salvation from foreign domination and from local collaborators who were selling out their own communities for personal gain. Jesus is telling these Judeans that they could either live their lives according to the broken reality in front of them or live in the hope of a different reality to come—they couldn't do both.

Do we engage in a faith that takes seriously the stark opposition of life according to worldly reality and life according to God's vision for us? Is it possible that we have for so long tried to avoid the stigma of hypocrisy—tried not to live in ways that fail to prove what we preach—that we've steered clear of providing any clear and inspiring vision? In my conversations with people who avoid religious affiliation (or who have left the church) I have ceased to be sad when they point to examples of hypocrisy; I can't control what all other Christians choose to say or do. But I am increasingly troubled when these same people cannot also point to inspiring, positive examples of Christian faithfulness.

Douglas John Hall encourages us to stop struggling against the decline of Christian centrality in North American life. He argues that if the church could stop worrying about having less power and less influence, it might actually discover a new freedom to be a compelling force for faithful engagement with the rest of society. In some sense, he's calling on us to embrace the wisdom of one of my favorite postmodern antiheroes, *Fight Club*'s Tyler Durden: "It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything."

Those of us in progressive mainline churches haven't lost everything . . . yet. But we can do and be more if we embrace the freedom of our new marginalization. We can take hope in knowing that an enduring image of peace—swords turned into plowshares—was born out of the desperation of a small and vulnerable nation that was trapped between mighty empires.

# Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, December 8  
Matthew 3:1-12

**AS ASSOCIATE PASTOR** for evangelism, I work to welcome new people into a large urban congregation. As I delve into the complexities of outreach in this postmodern age, I find that some of the most interesting conversations happen when I'm speaking to people who work in marketing.

Marketing attempts to connect individuals or communities with a product through branding. I talked with a professional who once helped market Gatorade, a brand that most of us know. I was surprised to hear that Gatorade marketers consider tap water to be part of the competition. Then I realized that their concern made absolute sense. Tap water is natural, it hydrates the body, is healthy and low in calories, *and it is free*. Tap water is an alternative to any sports drink.

I often hear about new or creative strategies for growing the church. Every once in a while a church embarks on an outreach campaign that strikes a chord in the surrounding community—and all of us other churchpeople scurry to figure out what's going on. This is doubly true if the persons reached are younger than 40.

Given declining numbers, a congregation's concern with outreach and growth—and the constant monitoring of the "competition"—is understandable. But it's also a bit embarrassing to think about how anxious we are about our numbers; how we worry about people connecting with our "brand"; how we sometimes scramble to compete with other congregations for a target audience.

As I read Matthew's story about some Judean clerics witnessing the spectacle of a madman preaching in the wilderness, I wonder if those clerics weren't experiencing some anxiety about their relevance in the local religious marketplace. Were they checking out the competition? They probably hoped that the raving camel-hair-wearing, locust-and-honey-eating prophet was a temporary sideshow they could discount as flashy marketing—full of shock value but empty of theological weight.

But before the leaders of the respectable, established name-brand Judean faith community can get close enough to see what's going on, John shouts out to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

John's words challenge all of us who worry about congrega-

tional growth. What difference does "doing church" make if lives are not changed? Then he warns against the certainty of our belief in our traditions. Will our time-honored ways of thinking about God and our relationship with Jesus save us when so much in our knowledge of ourselves and the world has changed? What good does it do to connect others to our traditions and values if those traditions don't address challenges that those persons face?

John the Baptist retreated from the established centers of religious life and went out into the wilderness, the messy real world, to speak to people about God. I too benefit from stepping back from the cramped vistas and narrow mind-sets that often define the religious landscape as I know it. From a distance I can see that we're not competing against other churches. We're competing against all the other ways that people find real community, meaning and spiritual nourishment.

My colleague John and I recently organized a fund-raiser for friends who serve as international mission coworkers. We wanted to gather as many people as possible and convince them to fund our friends in their good work. John and I both love barbecue, so we decided to make the event a barbecue cook-off. We needed an appealing and accessible setting, so we held the event in a local pub.

Our barbecue cook-off raised far more money than we anticipated. People ate and drank, laughed, connected with each other and celebrated the gifts of our friends who were leaving. When another pastoral colleague led us in singing "Spirit of the

## To our peers, we may look like camel-hair-wearing babblers.

"Living God, fall afresh on us," we felt God's Spirit and were renewed in our baptisms. Our eyes were opened to the presence of the holy in the wilderness of a neighborhood pub.

After this success, John and I are more inspired than ever to do church differently. We're considering a football tailgating church service before football games (a place where Americans can get a dose of community on a Sunday). To our peers we're starting to look like wide-eyed, camel-hair-wearing babblers. But if our goal is to prepare the way for God's coming—to give people an appealing and accessible way of connecting with God—then it doesn't matter much if the way we do church looks Reformed or orthodox. What matters is its impact on the lives of those around us.

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*The author is Hardy Kim, an associate pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago.*

## How Paul redefines monotheism

# One God, one Lord

by N. T. Wright

**HOW DOES** a follower of Jesus live within the world of pagan culture? Paul bases his (thoroughly Jewish) answer on the meaning of monotheism, a monotheism that is both creational and cultic. In 1 Corinthians, chapters six through eight, he insists on the goodness of the present creation and also on the need to be sure one is worshiping the One God and him alone, avoiding the snares of pagan idolatry wherever they may appear.

The whole passage is eschatological. The church is the people “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (10:11). The passage evokes the great Exodus narrative: it is in the context of the Exodus, the wilderness journeys and the anticipated entry into the “inheritance” that the Pentateuch provides the prayer which summed up what monotheism meant for Jews in the ancient world and to this day. It is a prayer of loyalty to the One God when surrounded by pagan temptations. The prayer of Deuteronomy 6:4 known as the Shema (“Hear”) is dense and notoriously difficult to translate (just as Paul’s reformulation of it is dense and resists easy rendering):

Hear, O Israel: YHWH is our God, YHWH alone. You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

This is the natural place for a first-century Jew to begin when thinking of how one should behave within a surrounding pagan culture.

This passage must have been dear to Saul of Tarsus. But what Paul the apostle—or someone else before him—has done with this famous prayer is utterly breathtaking. This central, decisive, sharply focused prayer of loyalty to the One God has been restated so as to include Jesus at its very heart: “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6).

The Shema was central for second-temple Jewish monotheists. It was an acted sign that spoke of this monotheism not as an abstract dogma but as the deeply personal reality that evoked the deeply personal response of prayer, love and allegiance. Personal—but also cosmic.

To pray the Shema was to embrace the yoke of God’s kingdom, to commit oneself to God’s purposes on earth as in heaven, whatever it might cost. It was to invoke and declare one’s loyalty to the One God who had revealed himself in action at the Exodus and was now giving his people their inheritance.

Paul uses the Shema in this passage in exactly this way not as a detached statement of a dogma, not as a spiritual aside, not simply in order to swat away the many gods and many lords of the previous verse, but as the foundation for the community which must live as the kingdom people in the midst of the pagan world.

But the Shema here is the redefined Shema. It has Jesus, and not least the crucified Jesus, at its center. The cross is not mentioned explicitly in the revised prayer, but as soon as Paul applies the point it becomes apparent that he is assuming it’s there. The underlying meaning should be clear, once we recog-

## Paul puts Jesus into the ancient prayer “Hear, O Israel . . . ”

nize the Exodus context of the original prayer and the new Exodus context of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians, chapters eight to ten. Just as the Exodus was launched by Israel’s God coming in person to rescue his people, so the new Exodus has been launched by the long-awaited return of this same God in and as Jesus himself.

**P**aul is invoking the central but usually ignored theme of the long-awaited return of Israel’s God to Zion. He uses the Shema here not as a detached dogmatic aside or maxim to be drawn on in a pragmatic ethical argument, but as a statement of eschatological and monotheistic divine identity. This is what it looked like when Israel’s God came back at last.

The Greek form of the Shema in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 6:4, which Jews across the Diaspora would say day by day, is this:

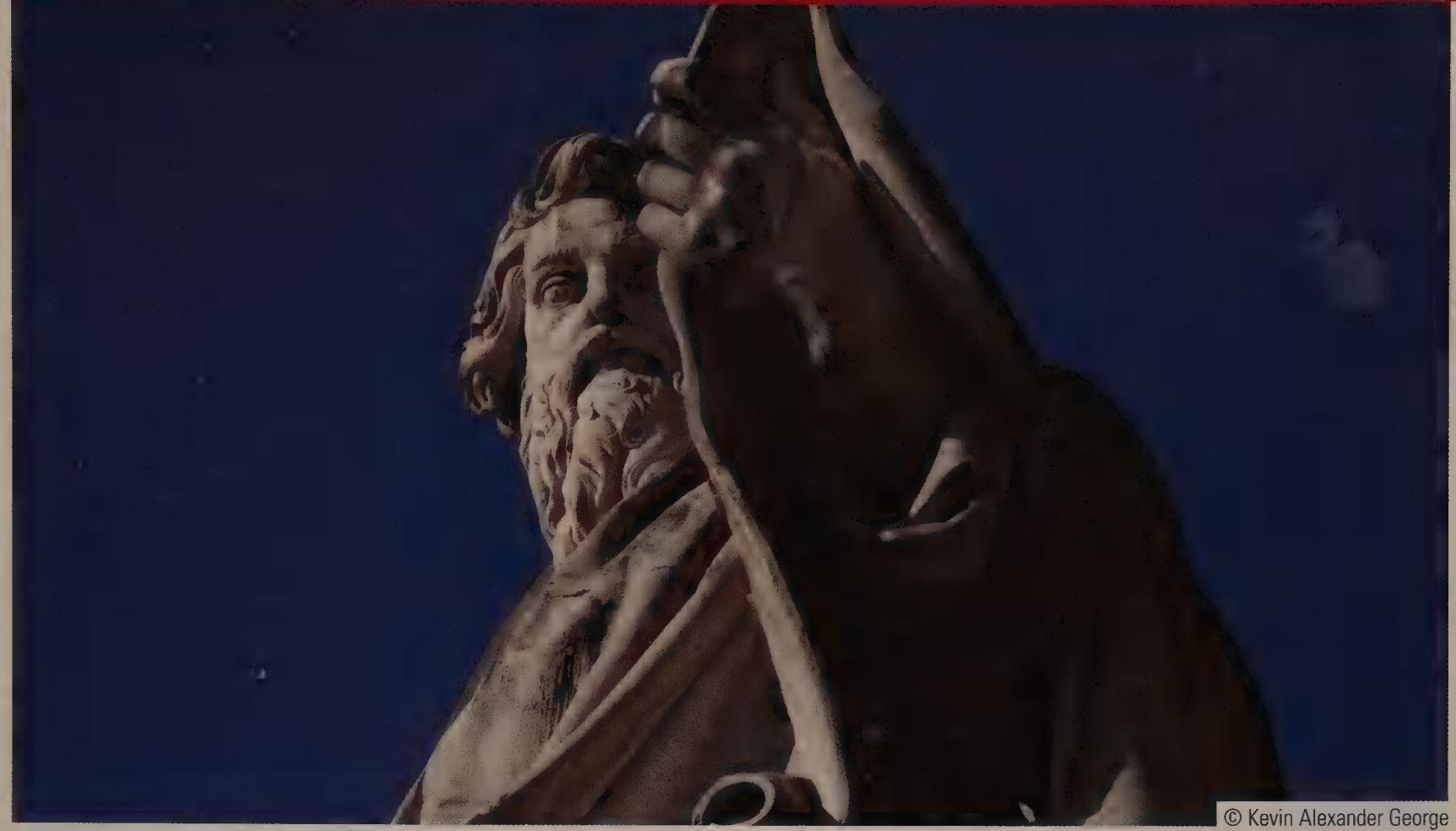
*akoue Israēl  
kyrios ho theos hēmon  
kyrios heis estin.*

Hear, Israel  
YHWH our God  
YHWH is one.

And the prayer continues, “And you shall love YHWH your God

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*N. T. Wright, Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar, teaches at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. This article is adapted from his book Paul and the Faithfulness of God, just published by Fortress and used by permission.*



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with all your heart, with all your *psyche*, and with all your power.”

Faced with a classic question about how to navigate the choppy waters of a pagan environment with its idols and temples, the obvious place to start for Paul is with second-temple monotheism; and one of the easiest ways of referring to that belief would be by referring to the Shema. The basic point for a Jesus follower in a world full of idols was simple: “We are monotheists, not pagan polytheists.”

The Shema-based allusions and echoes gather momentum from three verses back. First, “if anybody loves God” (1 Cor., v. 3); then “no God but one” (v. 4); then, as the rhetorical climax, verses 5 and 6.

So when it comes to food that has been offered to idols, we know that “idols are nothing in the world” and that “there is no God but one.” Yes, indeed: there may be many so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth. But for us

There is one God the father,  
from whom are all things, and we to him;  
and one lord, Jesus the Messiah,  
through whom are all things, and we through him.

This is dense. There are no verbs in the original formula, but Paul and his hearers would hardly need them. They would understand it to read: “There is one God the father, from whom *are* all things and we *are* to him, and one lord Jesus Messiah, through whom *are* all things and we *are* through him.”

Even that might be thought obscure. Perhaps we should gloss the first phrase with “and we *belong* to him,” though “to him” seems to mean more than “belonging”—something more like “we exist in relation to him,” “we live toward him.”

Perhaps, in the second phrase, we should reckon with something more explicit in relation to the saving work of the Messiah: not just “and we live through him” but “and we have been saved through him.” Or perhaps the formula was meant to remain evocative and mysterious.

The real shock of the passage, though, is simply the inclusion of Jesus within the Shema. The fact that Paul can do what he has done without explanation or justification speaks volumes for the theological revolution that had already taken place, which seems by this stage to be uncontroversially part of the Christian landscape. Paul is going to argue at length for positions that would be difficult and controversial for the Corinthians to grasp; he sees no need to argue for, or even explain any further, the astonishing theological claim of verse 6.

We may even guess that Paul, accustomed since childhood to pray the Shema at regular hours, had himself now been praying it and teaching others to pray it in this new fashion—perhaps for several years, invoking the kingdom of Jesus the Messiah as the present instantiation of the kingdom of God the father, as in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28.

The force of the revision is obvious. What Paul has done (or what someone else has done, which Paul is here quoting) is to separate *theos* and *kyrios*, *God* and *Lord*, in the original prayer, adding brief explanations. A small step for the language, a giant leap for the theology. Jesus is not a “second God”; that would abrogate monotheism entirely. He is not a semidivine intermediate figure. He is the one in whom the identity of Israel’s God is revealed.

The context, and the way the whole discussion flows from here, rubs in the point. In a world of “many gods and many lords,” with idols on every street and “tainted” idol meat in every market, the point of the statement is that “for us there is

One.” Throughout the letter, Paul is claiming to be standing on the ground of Jewish-style monotheism over against the pagan world.

There is one God, one Lord—therefore pagan idols, the gods and goddesses in the pantheon (including, of course, the emperor and his family, whose cult was flourishing at Corinth as elsewhere), were nonexistent. The emperors, of course, did “exist.” They were, or had been, people in the real world. The point was that they claimed to be divine but were not so in fact. As “divinities” they were nonexistent.

The result is dramatic: food that has been offered to these nongods and nonlords is simply food. Nothing of major theological, cultic or sociological relevance has actually happened to it. A follower of the One God, One Lord, can eat it with a clear conscience.

**S**econd-temple monotheism, reworked in accordance with the new Exodus belief that Israel’s God has returned at last in and as Jesus, anchors the key symbol of Paul’s worldview—the single community of the Messiah’s followers. The revised Shema sustains both the unity and the holiness of the community.

The starting point, addressing the question of holiness (should one eat “tainted” food?), is that people who understand this robust redefined monotheism can have a clear conscience in eating anything they like. The “gods” are hollow nonentities; don’t worry about them. Holiness will not be compromised if you eat.

## We cannot take anything out of this world

One of the few ways I can speak to you  
is sliding nylon hairs over wound aluminum,

praying low arpeggios under the choir’s hymn,  
or reeling in the kitchen as the soup overflows.

Today I lamented by the window as autumn’s  
gray mushrooms beaded the foot of the maple tree.

Triple-stopped strings, slightly flattened,  
my only real cry. You seemed to build heaven

for the air-spun singer who can bundle all the cords  
of her body in a breath. But I need the language

of arm and bow, callus and vibrato, clouds  
of rosin rising. Oh, let me keep it, Lord,

even when I rise from the grave,  
this quavering voice, this scuffed hourglass of wood.

Tania Runyan

But what about unity? What about those whose conscience is not yet clear on these matters but is rather, in Paul’s manner of speaking, “weak”? And what about those with a “strong” conscience who find themselves in the same community as the “weak”?

Answer: think through what it means that the monotheism upon which the worldview now rests has the crucified Messiah at its center. As in Philippians 2, the cross stands at the heart of the revelation of the One God, and hence at the heart of the worldview. If, on the basis of this rediscovered monotheism, believers go ahead and eat despite the scruples of the person

## Paul’s revised Shema provides the basis for a united, holy community.

with a “weak conscience,” they will be spurning the very inner nature of that same monotheism.

The Messiah’s death is thus not simply a convenient way for God to deal with sins. It reflects the heart and character of the one true God, and that reflection must shine through the life of the community that invokes this One God, One Lord. Otherwise, if you with knowledge of this One God, One Lord, go ahead and eat despite the weaker fellow believer, you may encourage such a person to go back into idolatry.

The revolution in theology is thus not simply the inclusion of Jesus within the Shema but the inclusion of the crucified Messiah at that point. Here is the ultimate scandal, as in 1 Corinthians 1:23. Not to recognize this point and not to act upon it will be the new scandal, the thing that will trip up the “weaker sibling.”

Choose your scandal, Paul seems to say: either the scandal of a crucified Messiah or the scandal of a destroyed fellow believer. The cross at the heart of God means the cross at the heart of the worldview symbol which is the united and holy family itself. All this follows directly from the belief in inaugurated eschatological monotheism, the belief that Israel’s God has returned in the person of Jesus.

This vital move, the direct consequence of the revised Shema, does not leave behind the Jewish context in which to pray the Shema is to invoke and commit oneself to God’s kingdom. In the very similar passage in Romans 14:17–18, where Paul has once again been using an essentially monotheistic argument to ground his appeal to regard food, drink and holy days as “things indifferent,” he explains: God’s kingdom, you see, isn’t about food and drink but about justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Anyone who serves the Messiah like this pleases God and deserves respect from other people.

Paul sees the community of those who live by the rule of the One God, One Lord—the community of the crucified Messiah, defined by him in his death and resurrection (Rom. 14:9)—as the community in and through whom God’s sover-

eign rule is coming to birth. To pray the revised Shema, just as much as the ancient one, was to take upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom.

For Paul, those who pray this revised Shema are committed to the sovereign rule of the one true God coming true through the victory of Jesus the Messiah on the cross in the past, and through the victory he will win over all enemies, including death itself, in the future (1 Cor. 15:20–28). In between those two victories, however, there will be a third: the quiet but significant victory in which members of his family learn to live not by insisting on their rights but by looking out for one another's needs and consciences. This is how the community will learn to live together as the united and holy people of God, which is Paul's principal aim at so many points: by the prayerful understanding, with renewed minds, of the identity of the One God, One Lord.

**P**aul spends chapter 9 explaining his own apostolic practice of "freedom," of knowing what his "rights" are and then not insisting on them, in order to ground his appeal to the "strong" that they should not insist on theirs. He then moves, in chapter 10, to a serious warning against idolatry—perhaps knowing that some will be tempted to say that they are strong because they want to be allowed to flirt once more with idolatry and the behavior that goes with it.

Not so, he says: you are the new Exodus people (1 Cor. 10:1–13), the people upon whom "the ends of the ages have met" (10:11). You must learn from the mistakes of the first Exodus people. Thus, for the strong as well, there must be none of the false logic that draws from monotheism the conclusion that, since idols don't exist, one might as well visit their temples from time to time. Paul does not draw back an inch from his basic principle, which he grounds in scripture: "The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord." The opening line of Psalm 24 gives as clear a statement of creational monotheism as one could wish, providing unambiguous permission to "eat whatever is sold in the market without making any judgments on the basis of conscience" (1 Cor. 10:25).

But there is more to this quotation than meets the eye. The Psalm is not just a statement about the fact that the Lord, having made all things, now owns all things, so that his people can enjoy them. It is a strong appeal for monotheistic worship and holiness of life, focused on access to the Temple:

Who shall ascend the hill of YHWH? Who shall stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. (Ps. 24:3–4)

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# NOTES FROM THE GLOBAL CHURCH

"What happens when you look at Christianity outside its Euro-American framework?

"That question becomes pressing when we look at numerical changes in the churches today—when, for instance, we realize that Africa will soon be home to the largest population of Christian believers on the planet.

"Although I describe my area of study as Global Christianity, that's a flawed phrase: if it's not global, is it really Christianity?"



Philip Jenkins's *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* is a landmark book for understanding contemporary global history. Publishers Weekly called it "a clarion call for anyone interested in the future of Christianity."

Philip Jenkins writes Notes from the Global Church for the *Christian Century*.

THE  
*Christian*  
CENTURY

"Lift[ing] up their souls to what is false": in other words, to idols, false divinities. Yes, we hear as Paul quotes the first verse: monotheism means that the Lord owns all things and gives them freely to you. But this also means that you must worship him alone and that you must abjure the behavior that idolatry awakens.

Those who follow the Psalmist's call to monotheistic holiness "will receive blessing from YHWH, and vindication from the God of their salvation" (Ps. 24:5). Paul has already spoken of the key motivation for avoiding idolatry: we are the people who eat and drink at the table of the Messiah, and we must not simultaneously share the table of demons. The way he makes this point in 1 Corinthians (16–17) provides another echo of the Psalm:

The cup of blessing which we bless is a sharing in the Messiah's blood, isn't it? The bread we break is a sharing in the Messiah's body, isn't it? There is one loaf; well, then, there may be several of us, but we are one body, because we all share the one loaf.

The *blessing* is the thing, and one must not trample upon it.

The cultic setting of the Psalm, with the cleansing of hands and heart in order to share in the worship, is matched exactly by Paul's appeal. He has not abandoned the Jewish call for holiness; he has merely redefined it. Nor need we be in doubt as to how, at least in 1 Corinthians, Paul would have understood the closing verses of the Psalm:

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the king of glory may come in.

Who is the king of glory?  
YHWH, strong and mighty, YHWH,  
mighty in battle.

The king of glory who, mighty in battle, has now entered into the place where earth and heaven meet and who is celebrated as such by his followers—this king, Paul would have said, is Jesus the Messiah. He is the one, mighty in battle, who has won the initial victory and will go on to win the final one (1 Cor. 15:20–28). And this, finally, increases the probability that when Paul quotes Psalm 24:1 in 1 Corinthians 10:26 he understands *kyrios* to refer to Jesus himself.

Paul's entire argument in 1 Corinthians, chapters eight through ten, is rooted in a second-temple monotheism reworked

around Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah and reapplied, in the new eschatological situation, to the life of the community that invokes him, that eats at his table, shares his blessing and celebrates his victory. The fresh theology provides the stable basis for a united, holy community, even though that community has none of the regular Jewish worldview symbols on which to rely for support. And that fresh theology—creational, eschatological and cultic monotheism, brought into three dimensions through having the crucified Jesus at its heart—finds its richest and densest expression in Paul's radical revision of the Shema. "For us there is one *theos*, one *kyrios*."

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# Inexhaustible Lewis

by Ralph C. Wood

AN OXFORD STUDENT once remarked to J. R. R. Tolkien that he had found his tutor C. S. Lewis to be “interesting.” “Interesting?” replied Tolkien. “Yes, he’s certainly that. But you’ll never get to the bottom of him.” The books, all published to mark the 50th anniversary of Lewis’s death, reveal the truthfulness of Tolkien’s response.

Lewis has fared well in the half century since his death on November 22, 1963. (The death date is easy to remember: the world had its eyes trained not on Headington Quarry, the suburb north of Oxford where Lewis lay dying, but on Dallas, Texas, where John F. Kennedy was assassinated.) His books have sold perhaps a billion copies. His undying presence on the British cultural scene will be ensured by the memorial plaque to be unveiled this month in his honor in Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Among the general studies of Lewis’s life and ideas, Alister McGrath’s two volumes rank among the best. McGrath gets at the slippery character of Lewis by quoting James Como’s comment that Lewis “at once hid [himself] absolutely, distorted it, and invented parts of it to parade forth; he repressed, explored, and denied it; he indulged and overcame it; certainly he would transform, and then transcend it; almost always he used it.” Even so close a friend as Owen Barfield admitted that “I had the impression of living with, not one, but two Lewises; and this was so as well when I was enjoying his company as when I was absent from him.” Among this plethora of personalities, two are worthy of special note: Lewis the confident apologist and Lewis the much less certain artist.

Samuel Joeckel’s *The C. S. Lewis Phenomenon* is sure to shake the foundations of Lewis studies. Joeckel makes the revolutionary case that Lewis became the most important Christian intellectual of the 20th century because he wrote in full accord with the modernist foundations that have undergirded public discourse since the 18th century. Against the popular notion that Lewis was opposed to the Enlightenment, Joeckel demonstrates that Lewis embraced most of its governing assumptions:

1. That human experience is basically the same across the entire spectrum of cultures and civilizations;
2. That human reason is able to transcend the particularities of history by occupying a “view from nowhere,” a timeless and placeless objectivity;
3. That from this alleged neutral standpoint one can establish moral and even aesthetic certainties;

C. S. Lewis—A Life:  
Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet  
By Alister McGrath  
Tyndale House, 448 pp., \$24.99

The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis  
By Alister E. McGrath  
Wiley-Blackwell, 206 pp., \$32.95 paperback

The C. S. Lewis Phenomenon:  
Christianity and the Public Sphere  
By Samuel Joeckel  
Mercer University Press, 444 pp., \$30.00 paperback

A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C. S. Lewis  
By Devin Brown  
Brazos, 256 pp., \$14.99 paperback

C.S. Lewis: A Biography of Friendship  
By Colin Duriez  
Lion Hudson, 256 pp., \$16.95 paperback

Surprised by the Feminine:  
A Rereading of C. S. Lewis and Gender  
By Monika B. Hilder  
Peter Lang, 230 pp., \$84.95

C. S. Lewis and the Inklings: Discovering Hidden Truth  
Edited by Salwa Khoddam and Mark R. Hall  
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 275 pp., \$75.99

Plain to the Inward Eye: Selected Essays on C. S. Lewis  
By Don W. King  
Abilene Christian University Press, 288 pp., \$25.99 paperback

4. That a public intellectual such as Lewis can make convincing appeals to our “common humanity”; and

5. That because these very same Enlightenment assumptions put Christianity under attack, apologetics becomes the chief mode of Christian discourse, in the conviction that, standing outside Christianity, a defender of the faith can establish proofs for its validity.

Joeckel is quick to note that most public intellectuals have been progressive reformers, whereas Lewis sought to defend traditional orthodoxies. Nor does he deny that Lewis styled himself as a dinosaur, an outsider to the materialist and scientific assumptions of his age. Even so, Lewis remained incorrigibly modernist in his antimodernism. *Mere Christianity*, for example, became the most celebrated of Lewis’s works because it claims to transcend the contingencies of church history and the conflicts of Christian doctrine. It does so in order to defend a basic, bedrock, non-negotiable kind of Christianity that is supposedly common to all believers in all times and all places.

Lewis’s immense modernist success was purchased, how-

ever, at considerable cost. He minimized the huge, often nullifying disagreements among Christians about these very matters. Examples of such internecine conflict are not hard to find—from disputes over the oneness of substance between the Father and the Son to arguments over the two natures of Christ, the procession of the Trinity, the nature of baptism and Eucharist, modes of church government and clerical celibacy.

Joeckel is not denying the worth of Lewis's vigorous defenses of Christianity, nor is he disputing the validity of the hundreds of Christian conversions that have been their result. He is pointing out, instead, that Lewis could never have had such broad and deep appeal if he were not employing such Enlightenment notions (to use Lewis's own phrases) as "the law of nature," "innate morality," "objective value," and "conformity to reason." By claiming the essential concord between Christianity and these modernist concepts—though of course the latter were never identified as such—Lewis was able to succeed as did no other 20th century apologist.

Joeckel is perhaps most incisive when he describes Lewis's fiction, except for the Narnian novels and *Till We Have Faces*, as apologetics. A term with the same root as apologetics, an apologue is a work of narrative art that seeks to argue a thesis by clothing

## Lewis left apologetics behind for the subtleties of art.

it in plot and character, image and atmosphere. The message doesn't arise out of the matter, therefore, but totally subordinates it. After reading an apologue, we remember the meaning it conveys far more than its central scenes and personages.

Unlike a genuinely imaginative work of art, an apologue usually has clear and unambiguous import. Never in *The Screwtape Letters*, for example, do we find Screwtape doubting the legitimacy of his demonic enterprise, for Lewis's express aim is to make superlative evil utterly transparent. And while there are moments of immense wonder and beauty in *Perelandra*—the discovery of solid space amid interplanetary travel, the floating islands and mystical creatures called sorns and hrossa, the nonerotic quality of the naked Green Lady—they serve largely as a staging ground for the intellectual debates between Ransom and Weston.

"Lewis's fiction," Joeckel argues, "almost always gravitates toward the expository mode, eager to flesh out arguments and defend claims that lead readers to . . . the truth of Christianity."

This is not a weakness, Joeckel adds, for it was precisely Lewis's intention to convey theological truths more than to provide an imaginative experience. Dorothy L. Sayers, a strong Lewis advocate, was nonetheless dissatisfied with such triumphs of apologetics over art. "One trouble about C. S. Lewis," she wrote, "is his fervent missionary zeal. I welcome his able dialectic [i.e., his skill in argumentation], and he is a tremendous hammer for heretics. But he is apt to think that one should rush into every fray and strike a blow for Christendom, whether or not one is equipped by training and temperament for that particular conflict."

This was also J. R. R. Tolkien's complaint when he designat-

ed Lewis as "Everyman's theologian"—a tart term for the populist and subscholarly character of his friend's apologetic work. Tolkien feared that his fellow Inkling was making dubious pronouncements on matters about which he had not made long and deep study. In a 1958 dustup in the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*, the theologian Norman Pittenger brought similar charges against Lewis, chiding him for resorting to straw man accounts of his opponents, especially naturalists. Lewis replied that he was a deliberate simplifier and amateur, a "translator" of complex theological concepts into vernacular terms that ordinary intelligent readers could comprehend.

Pittenger's prescient reply makes the point that Lewis missed entirely—namely, that he had employed facile Enlightenment means to establish complex Christian ends and thus that he had denied both the subtlety and profundity of mature faith:

This kind of thing seems to me very *bad* "modernism." The apologist has two obligations laid upon him: to commend the faith, but at the same time to commend it with absolute integrity of mind, with guarding of style, with nuances, with fine shades, with ambiguity, at those places where these things are indicated as essential to a fully truthful presentation of the faith.

Lewis counterpunched by charging that Pittenger's method would have been "worse than useless." It would have both confused and alarmed the common reader whom Lewis sought to convince: "He would have thought, poor soul, that I [i.e., Lewis] was facing both ways, sitting on the fence, offering at one moment what I withdrew the next." Lewis dodges Pittenger's central concern—that converts made by simplistic modernist means are likely to be locked in a simplistic modernist faith.

**E**ven so ardent a Lewis advocate as Chad Walsh—whose 1949 study entitled *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* provided the first serious reading of Lewis for American audiences—was put off by Lewis's notorious insistence that Jesus was either "liar, lunatic, or Lord." To this classic logical fallacy of the false dilemma, Walsh wittily retorted, "It is always possible that God can count beyond two." There are many identities that can be ascribed to Jesus, whether rightly or wrongly, other than this notion that he was either bad, mad, or God. N. T. Wright has noted, for example, that Lewis's argument "doesn't work as history, and it backfires dangerously when historical critics question his reading of the Gospels."

Devin Brown and Colin Duriez have written valuable if rather conventional accounts of Lewis the man. Brown is especially adept in explaining Lewis's famous argument for God's existence from the experience of Joy. Joy is the English synonym that Lewis chose for the German word *Sehnsucht*. The latter is rooted in the verb *sehnen* (to long for, to yearn after) and the noun *Sucht* (sickness, passion, even rage). Lewis spoke of Joy in the upper case, perhaps fearing that such terms as *yearning* and *passion* might lead readers to dismiss him as an effete and dreamy romantic, an aficionado of sexual sublimation by way of an otherworldly bliss.

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Ralph C. Wood recently wrote *Chesterton: The Nightmare Goodness of God*.

Brown shows, instead, that Lewis regarded Joy as the foundational quality of every well-lived human story. It is a natural desire for the supernatural, a fundamental impulse of the soul that leads not to self-abnegation and contempt for the world, but to the supreme delight of participation in God's own life. Not unlike St. Augustine's claim that human hearts are restless because they secretly or openly seek rest in God, Lewis regarded Joy as the driving desire to enter the realm wherein the earth's splendors have their transcendent origin and sustenance and end. That Lewis belongs to the Platonist-Augustinian tradition can hardly be doubted.

Duriez, who like Brown is a veteran laborer in the vineyards of Lewis studies, stresses Lewis's capacity for friendship. He pays careful attention to Lewis's remarkable loyalty to his alcoholic brother Warnie; his childhood companion and lifelong confidant Arthur Greeves; his tough-minded Scots tutor William Kirkpatrick; his "adoptive mother" Janie Moore and her daughter Maureen; the one real philosopher among the Inklings, Owen Barfield; the magic-obsessed novelist Charles Williams; as well as Tolkien and Davidman. Though each of these friendships is worth book-length treatment, Duriez deftly deals with them in short compass.

The burden of Monika Hilder's book is to answer the charge that Lewis was a sexist. Hilder admits that Lewis's formal pronouncements, when isolated from the totality of his work, sound outrageously misogynist. In his *Preface to "Paradise Lost,"* for

example, Lewis declares that "whether the male is, or is not, the superior sex, the masculine is certainly the superior gender." Yet Hilder shows that Lewis's deepest sympathies can legitimately be called feminine. For example, the virtues of the classical hero—conquest, deceit, pride, and especially "martial valor . . . in establishing worldly power"—are usually regarded as masculine, but they rarely appear in Lewis's work except to be disdained. By contrast, the spiritual heroism embedded in Judeo-Christian tradition—care, submission, obedience, truthfulness, humility, and especially mercy—are usually regarded as feminine. Lewis's fiction is filled with characters who embody such qualities.

Salwa Khoddam, another veteran of Lewis scholarship, brings a refreshingly Orthodox vision, especially with its emphasis on the iconic imagination and the doctrine of theosis. Unlike much of the Western focus on the Atonement and thus on redemption from sin, the Eastern church is centered upon our participation in the divine life itself, so that nature and spirit are not at war with each other. Khoddam observes that, in both *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Last Battle*, Lewis envisions Aslan's country as lying beyond the borders of the world, yet also as having its many places of mysterious entry into the world.

**T**he main breakthrough made evident in these books is that after World War II Lewis often turned away from defending Christianity against both its cultured and benighted despisers. He directed his energies less to discursive expositions of the faith than to imaginative explorations of it. Don W. King, in an anthology of his own essays on and reviews of Lewis, discerns this shift, especially in treating Lewis's poetry. When writing in this most concrete and image-dependent form, he is least able to offer pat answers to wrenching difficulties.

In "After Prayers, Lie Cold," Lewis declares that after having bedtime devotions it is best to regard the frosty bed as analogous to the grave, the wintry end that awaits us. It will bury all our frenetic striving, bringing rest to the body and mercy to the soul. The warmth awaiting at dawn may not be a token of the final Resurrection so much as a return to the furor of the daily fray:

Be not too quickly warm again. Lie cold; consent  
To weariness' and pardon's watery element.  
Drink up the bitter water, breathe the chilly death;  
Soon enough comes the riot of our blood and breath.

Rowan Williams, one of the finest guides to the dark undercurrents that ripple beneath the Narnian books, interprets them

**"We never want to go back to normal."**

—United Methodist pastor

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as fictional “supposals,” as Lewis himself called them. Rather than dispensing ready-made answers, Lewis brings fictional life to such questions as these: What would it be like for a Christian to do daily battle with an evil whose chief tactic is deception, or to travel to unfallen planets, or to inhabit a world populated with talking beasts, or to confront God incarnate in animal form?

When Lewis dealt with such “what if” questions, and when he put himself under the constraints of authentic art, he was often able to throw off the modernist mantle of rationalist objectivity, of timeless and placeless morality, of the false notion that the world’s religions and myths are variations on a single theme, and thus of the rhetorical point-scoring that readily crowns Christianity as the true fulfillment of them all.

In the seven Narnian novels, in *Till We Have Faces*, in *A Grief Observed*, as well as many of his poems, we find a Lewis who speaks from inside the imaginative and confessional worlds he narrates, not as a modernist justifier of the faith. Above all, we meet Lewis the Christian who knows that to believe is to be engaged with the darkest doubts and deepest troubles.

In 1940, for example, in *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis had confronted the issue of undeserved suffering. “What seems to us good may not be good in His eyes,” he wrote, “and what seems to us evil may not be evil.” He then offered a rather glib answer: “The Divine ‘goodness’ differs from ours . . . not as white differs from black but as a perfect circle from a child’s first effort to draw a wheel.” In *A Grief Observed*, published in 1961 in response to

his wife Joy Davidman’s death from cancer, he abandons such trite and assuring analogies. Instead, Lewis confesses the sheer tyranny of grief, as it obliterated not only his confidence in God but also rendered Joy herself terribly unreal. “Reality, looked at steadily, is unbearable.” “There is nothing we can do with suffering except to suffer it.” “My idea of God . . . has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast.”

Nowhere in Lewis’s apologetic works do we encounter such humbled and vexed belief as this. Yet he had anticipated something like it in *Till We Have Faces* five years earlier, in 1956. This pre-Christian recasting of the Cupid and Psyche myth is a genuine work of imaginative fiction containing no candy-coated theodicy. Perhaps because he wrote it in close collaboration with Joy Davidman, Lewis creates a convincing female protagonist named Orual.

Though far from innocent, she has a legitimate complaint against divinity. Hers is not a cry so much as a scream against the deity whose exactions, as Job and Jeremiah both protested, would be beyond bearing had he not borne them for us: “The Divine Nature wounds and perhaps destroys us,” Orual confesses, “merely by being what it is.” Only when she embraces this enigma does she also learn that true faith consists in nothing less than saying “Yes” to this unknown God. Here Lewis hints that the Unknowable has been made agonizingly yet graciously known in Israel and Christ and the Church. This word comes not from Lewis the apologist so much as from Lewis the artist. It is this Lewis and this God who remain inexhaustible. cc

Join Xochitl Alvizo, Ryan Kemp-Pappan, John Vest, Jeff Chu, Jonnie Russell, Bromleigh McCleneghan, Tony Jones, H. Adam Ackley, Tripp Fuller, Reggie Blount, Lillian Daniel, Cláudio Carvalhaes, Lib Caldwell, Andrew Root, Laura Truax, Doug Pagitt, David Wood, Chris Rodkey, and more, as we chart a path forward for youth ministry in the coming progressive era.



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# Jewish and pacifist

by J. Denny Weaver

**THE NOTION THAT** God does not hesitate to use violence or destruction to punish evil and exact vengeance is widely held and often reinforced by the popular media. The Left Behind books and movies featured divinely caused mayhem. The History Channel's series *The Bible* put divine violence on graphic display.

Such depictions raise questions for people both inside and outside the church. Beyond the obvious question of whether we can really love and worship a God of violence, a problem of ethics arises. It is a very short step from depicting violence as God's way of responding to problems to seeing human violence as a way of helping God. I want to challenge both this view of God and this application.

Christians have long professed to believe that God is in Christ and that God is revealed in the story of Jesus Christ. It is also generally accepted that the narrative of Jesus shows that he refused to use violence in responding to his adversaries. Putting these two affirmations together leads us to describe God as one whose actions are consistent with the merciful and nonviolent Jesus.

Over the centuries, many Christians have found ways to reject that equation. In the past few years, however, a small but growing number of voices have been arguing that we should in fact understand God in terms of the nonviolence revealed in the story of Jesus.

One of the most prevalent arguments against the idea of a nonviolent God is the multitude of stories and images of divine violence and divinely sanctioned violence in the Old Testament. Think of the flood, by which an angry God is pictured as killing all the people on earth—as well as a lot of animals—except for Noah and his family and the animals he collected on the ark. Or recall the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, which featured the miracle at the Red Sea in which God drowned all of Pharaoh's army.

Israel's conquest of Palestine is pictured as a bloody affair. A favorite activity for Sunday school classes is depicting Joshua's army marching around the city of Jericho and its walls tumbling down. Not usually taught or acted out is the next part of the story. Except for the prostitute Rahab and her family, every living being in the city—men, women, children, oxen, sheep, donkeys—were “devoted to destruction” (Josh. 6:21), massacred by the Israelite army.

Jump to the story of King Saul. Saul was commanded by God to utterly destroy Amalek—“Kill both man and woman, child

and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Sam. 15:3)—and when he spared King Agag and the best of the livestock, this disobedience so angered God that Saul's kingship was withdrawn.

But such violence perpetrated and vouchsafed by God is by no means all of the story. The stories of the patriarchs include, for instance, cases in which conflicts are resolved nonviolently. One example involves Abram and his nephew Lot. Their flocks, herds and tents were so numerous that the land could not support both of them, and their herders quarreled. Abram suggested that they separate their operations, and he gave Lot the choice of land. Lot chose to move east into the plain of the Jordan and Abram moved west into Palestine (Gen. 13).

Isaac is the actor in another instance of nonviolent conflict resolution. Isaac's prosperity evoked jealousy on the part of neighboring Philistines. They stopped up Isaac's wells, and

## The Old Testament displays both violent and nonviolent solutions.

their herders quarreled with Isaac's shepherds. Rather than engaging in strife, three times Isaac moved on and dug new wells, thereby demonstrating that there was room for all to reside in peace (Gen. 26:12–22). It seems that since God had promised the land, there was no need to fight for it.

For an example from the time of the kings, consider Elisha's handling of an invasion ordered by the king of Aram in 2 Kings 6. As the story goes, with God's help the prophet Elisha several times warned the king of Israel of places to avoid in order to escape ambushes by the military of the king of Aram. Frustrated, the king sent a large armed force to capture Elisha. But the eyes of this force were blinded so that they did not recognize Elisha. Elisha told them that though the person they sought was elsewhere, he would lead them to him. Then Elisha led them into Samaria, where they were surrounded by the forces of the king of Israel.

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J. Denny Weaver is professor emeritus of religion of Bluffton University in Ohio. His book *The Nonviolent God* will be published this year by Eerdmans.

The Israelite king wanted to massacre the Aramean force, but Elisha told him instead to prepare food and drink for the Arameans. After they had feasted, the Israelite king sent them back to their own king. The story concludes, "And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:23). This victory, which occurred with both divine backing of Elisha and use of a ruse, was followed by kindness to the invaders—a nonviolent resolution to the story.

The book of Daniel contains stories of the Hebrews in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah 29 quotes a letter that Jeremiah sent to these exiles. He told them to stop pining for Palestine and to recognize that they were in Babylonia for the long haul. His advice was to get married and raise families, and then find wives and husbands for their children. They were to learn the language and engage in professions useful to Babylonian society. Jeremiah said, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7). Most important, while living in ways that assist the Babylonians, they are to maintain their identity and witness as the people of God.

The stories of Daniel and his three friends align with Jeremiah's injunction. The young men served in King Nebuchadnezzar's court in Babylon, learning skills that would result in their assuming high office in the king's administration. But they maintained their identity among God's people—requesting to eat their own food rather than the rich food provided by the king and refusing to worship the huge golden statue that the king had set up. As a result they were thrown into the fiery furnace. God saved them, and their witness to the God of the Hebrews was recognized. Daniel continued to pray publicly to his God, and as a result he was cast into the lion's den. Again God protected Daniel, and his witness to the God of Israel was recognized. These are stories of nonviolent cultural resistance.

These accounts of a nonviolent God or divinely blessed nonviolent practices need to be considered alongside the accounts of a violent God and violent practices. When these vignettes, representing many more such stories, are viewed together, it becomes apparent that the Old Testament does not present a uniform picture of God. The Old Testament depicts God in several ways, supporting both violent and nonviolent responses to problems. In fact, the text displays an ongoing conversation between conflicting views of the character of God and what it means to follow God. The Old Testament does not resolve that conversation.

In light of this conflicted view of God in the Old Testament, the story of Jesus becomes exceedingly important. As a Jew, Jesus carried forward the story of God's

people Israel. Christians confess Jesus as the Messiah who was to come out of that people.

So which side of the conversation about the character of God in the Old Testament—the violent or the nonviolent side—is carried forward and comes to fruition in Jesus? The answer is obvious. Recognizing that Jesus carries forward one side of the conversation about the character of God is not a picking and choosing or a cutting out of part of the Old Testament. On the contrary. Only with the entire unexpurgated story in view does one see that in fact there is an ongoing conversation.

But acknowledging the conversation brings to the fore how Jesus continued it. When we see the full story present in the Old Testament, it is clear that Jesus did not invent nonviolence; that is, nonviolence as the way of the reign of God did not begin with him. Rather, Jesus brought additional visibility to God's rejection of violence, and the resurrection gave yet additional validation to a rejection of violence by testifying to the life of Jesus as truly the life of God.

These lessons from the story of Jesus as a continuation of the Old Testament's conversation about God all point to recognizing that the nonviolent trajectory in the Old Testament best characterizes the nature of God and that in Jesus a God is revealed whom we should describe and worship with nonviolent, rather than violent, images.

This way of seeing the relationship of the life of Jesus to the Old Testament has a number of implications. First, it becomes

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apparent that the Bible is not a rule book that prescribes conduct or establishes images to imitate today, nor is it a book whose laws necessarily dictate dos and don'ts directly to us across more than two millennia. It is rather a historical record of how God's people came to understand themselves as God's people, and how they understood their God and how their God worked in the world. And because their understanding of God was developing, it is natural that different views of God would appear.

We should expect to see instances in which people got things wrong, without thereby turning that recognition into a rejection of the truth of the Bible. We should get used to the idea that not all biblical writings speak with the same voice, which enables us to say that some ideas in scripture are wrong or misguided and can be abandoned. With changes occurring and different perspectives appearing, it should be obvious that contemporary interpreters are not obligated to, and in fact cannot, harmonize or synthesize all biblical statements on a particular question into one homogenous view—whether on God, the blessing of marriage to multiple wives (alongside a clear endorsement of monogamous marriage) or decisions for or against circumcision or slavery.

Our job is not to try to synthesize all these views but to determine the direction in which the biblical story is moving. Seeing that it is a story makes clear that we, the church today, are the current edition, the cutting edge, of that ongoing story. We are to keep the story moving in the direction that is on display when we look at the Bible as a whole. For Christians, the indispensable reference point for determining the direction in which the story is moving and changing is the story of Jesus. And that story points us in the direction of recognizing that the God revealed in Jesus is a nonviolent God.

Seeing Jesus as the culmination of the Old Testament story tells us something important about that portion of the Bible. It tells us that the Old Testament really is Christians' book. In fact, it is only with the diverse Old Testament narratives that we fully see the significance of Jesus and how he advanced the story of God's people Israel.

## In the vineyard

Lineage matters, but thirst makes greatness possible. Carried across oceans, these vines have rooted on this shore, to live always on the edge of death. The vinedresser prunes tendrils and branches lifted in supplication, rationing water so that the vines bear their fruit in deserts of constraint. Now the globed sweetness is crushed for you, the burst skin returned to the earth, feeding tomorrow. The wine in the dark oak waiting, rises at last in the cup now lifted to meet this human thirst. It sings this moment in the mouth of the living.

Linda Mills Woolsey

These observations about how Jesus advanced the story of Israel calls for making explicit what is implicit in this account. Recently writings by J. Kameron Carter (*Race: A Theological Account*) and Willie James Jennings (*The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*) point to the disastrous results that followed when Christian theology separated Jesus from his Jewishness. It is Jesus' Jewishness that located him in a particular history in a particular place and time.

Carter and Jennings argue that the separation of Jesus from his Jewishness is what led to the accommodation and eventual support of racism by traditional theology. They argue that the separation began with the early church fathers and is visible in the customary christological definitions of Jesus as "one in being with the Father" and as "truly God and truly man." With Jesus defined in terms that located him above history,

## The nonviolent reign of God did not begin with Jesus.

European theologians could define him in generic, supposedly universal terms, but in ways that in fact reflected themselves. Without stating it specifically, Jesus became white, and European white identity became the norm.

When slaves from Africa were brought into the picture, the idea of "pure" blood developed, with European white as the norm of purity. Deviations from this norm, whether in color or in form of government, produced varying degrees of inferior status and gave the Europeans a sense of superiority over other ethnic groups. This was the attitude with which the Portuguese, the Spaniards and later the French and English colonized Africa, the Americas and Asia. Carter uses Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor to show that orthodox Christian theology could have avoided this disastrous path. Carter and Jennings issue a profound and heartfelt call to make the Jewishness of Jesus central for any theology that confronts racism.

I have argued that Jesus' rejection of violence was a continuation of a strand visible in Israel at least since the time of Jeremiah. Thus to the agenda of Carter and Jennings I would add that Jewish Jesus was—to use a modern term—a pacifist and that his rejection of violence should be intrinsic to theology about Jesus and included in the character of the God revealed in him.

The profession that Jesus continues the story of Israel and the call to make his Jewishness visible in our theology also calls for clarifying the relationship of Christians to Jews. Both Daniel Boyarin in *Border Lines* and John Howard Yoder in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* have argued that for several centuries people who recognized Jesus as the Messiah and those who did not worshiped together in church or synagogue. In other words, disagreements on whether Jesus was the Messiah did not get one expelled from the community as a heretic. A division into mutually exclusive camps came later—but there has never been a historical con-

sensus on the time or event at which the schism became inevitable or final.

Both Yoder and Boyarin locate the beginning of the schism with Justin's attempt in the second century to define the Logos as an exclusively Christian possession, even though many or most Jews believed in the Logos. Yoder and Boyarin agree that the schism involved the elimination of what Boyarin called "hybrids" and Yoder the "middle parties"—namely, the groups that had some affinity with the two sides through different views of incarnation and Logos.

Yoder identifies a possible end point of the schism in the fourth century when Christians gained political power and could change the social meaning of their group. Boyarin locates the end point of the schism a bit later, with the promulgation of the code of Theodosius in 438, which defined Christianity as the pure religion and Judaism as false.

In spite of his high claims about Jesus—claims not shared by Boyarin—Yoder also contends that faith in the Jewish pacifist Jesus was not something that put him outside the people of Israel. Likewise, neither does Boyarin's rejection of these high claims about Jesus place him outside the people of Israel. The point of the historical analysis by both writers is that the conversation between Jews and Christians could and would change if the focus shifted away from debate about the specifics of the incarnation—which began with Justin—and toward the question of whether Jesus was the Messiah. The absence of a historical consensus on the finality of the schism indicates that Christians and Jews could even now still be engaged in an in-house debate about whether Jesus is the Messiah.

In light of these historical observations, and without surrendering his high Christology, Yoder suggests that the schism "did not have to be." Boyarin recognizes the logic and the attractiveness of that position but resists it because accepting it would mean at least a partial rejection of his own distinct tradition. Yoder's "it did not have to be" may be viewed by people in the Jewish tradition as one more effort by the majority Christian tradition to tell Jews who they are. Rather than seeking to undo the schism, which would imply that his Jewish tradition is unnecessary, Boyarin suggests that we "live it differently."

Seeing Jesus as a continuation of the narrative of Israel makes the Old Testament a Christian's book and identifies Christians as a continuation of the people of God whose father is Abraham. But there can be no question of a replacement of Israel by the church, no question of supersessionism, no question whether God has abandoned the Jews or whether the promises to Abraham have

been shifted uniquely to Christians. Historically, the belief that the age of the Messiah had begun with Jesus was a new stream within Judaism. But those who did not and do not accept Jesus as Messiah are equally part of the stream of God's people whose father is Abraham.

Some Christians might thus imply that accepting Jesus as Messiah is an "advance" or a "going beyond." But regardless of the language used, it may not be construed as a declaration that denies God's promise in the other stream. Rather, the relationship of these two streams calls forth continuing conversation and cooperation. It is a going forward that respects differences without a perceived need to convert the other side. In Yoder's sense, it is an undoing of the schism that did not have to be. For Boyarin it is a preserving of traditions. It may well be that the most fruitful conversation can occur when identities are respectfully maintained rather than glossed over. And the fruitful and freeing dimension of the conversation is that disagreement and maintaining of identity can proceed without a sense of mutual exclusion from the people of God as we discuss together what it means to live as God's people.

I have ranged far from the initial question about the nonviolence of God, which indicates the wide-ranging theological and ethical impact of locating Christian identity with the narrative of Jesus rather than with one or another of the classic creeds and confessions of Christendom's various denominations. This reformation in Christian thought is just beginning.

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## Spiritual and Religious: What Can Religious Traditions Learn from Spiritual Seekers?

Monday, December 2, 2013 | 6 p.m.

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**Nancy Tatom Ammerman**,  
author of *Sacred Stories,  
Spiritual Tribes: Finding  
Religion in Everyday Life*

**Peter Phan**, Department  
of Theology, Georgetown  
University

**Lauren Winner**, author  
of *Mudhouse Sabbath:  
An Invitation to a Life of  
Spiritual Discipline*

**Serene Jones**, President,  
Union Theological Seminary

Organized religion faces a critical challenge: Americans increasingly identify as "seekers" who are not bound to a single tradition but are open to insights from multiple religious and spiritual sources. Some call themselves spiritual but not religious; others, multireligious. Still others are grounded in one faith tradition, but embrace spiritual practices from another.

Spiritual seekers are taking a lead in shaping the future of faith. What accounts for this surge in spiritual seeking? Are institutionalized traditions to blame for these developments?

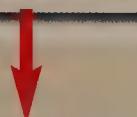
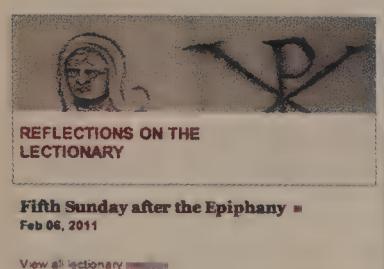
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by Stephanie Paulsell

## The view from above

**THE PHILOSOPHER** and historian Pierre Hadot wrote that “the view from above” is the “philosophical way par excellence of looking at things.” Seeking a cosmic perspective on human existence, ancient lovers of wisdom cultivated a view from above through spiritual exercises. Distance, they argued, reveals connections, correspondences and patterns that cannot be seen up close. From a bird’s-eye view, as the poet Goethe wrote, we can see “the mad labyrinths of the world spread out before us.”

I was reminded of the ancient desire for an encompassing view of the world while watching Paul Greengrass’s film *Captain Phillips*. Based on the hijacking of an American container ship by young Somali pirates and their kidnapping of the ship’s captain, the film is marked by frequent shifts of perspective. We move back and forth between the bridge of a massive container ship afloat in the Indian Ocean and the hull of the pirates’ tiny skiff as it is battered by the waves. One moment we are in the captain’s SUV, listening to his worried conversation with his wife about their children’s futures; in the next we are in a camp where Somalis live in inhuman conditions, the monotony of their days broken only by the appearance of armed men who take the young men out to sea to rob passing ships.

By insisting that we regard the events of the film from the perspective of every character, the film reaches for an encompassing view of the world’s “mad labyrinths.” From a distance the defining image of the story is clear: a very small boat gaining on a very large one. We look down on the two boats from the sky; we see them locked in relationship on the ship’s radar screen. We realize that, long before they ever meet, the lives of the pirates and the captain were already bound together through globalized systems of power and trade.

No matter how involved we get in the particulars of this tale—wanting the captain to return safely to his family or hoping that the pirates will take the cash from the safe and leave the ship without hurting anyone—the view from above reminds us that we are watching this larger story. What we can see as we look down from the sky is that something is amiss in the way the world works. How desperate do four young men have to be to try to board a 17,000-ton ship while torrents of water rain down on them from the ship’s hoses? Why can’t they make a living as fishermen? Where are all the fish? What are the environmental effects of global trade on life along the Horn of Africa?

And where are we in this story? When the camera pulls back, giving us a view from above, we realize that the story includes us all.

As I write this we are entering the last weeks of the season of Pentecost. The lectionary has us traveling the road to Jerusalem and listening to Jesus’ stories. These stories are also told through multiple perspectives. In the story of the prodigal son we see the events unfold through the eyes of the prodigal, his brother and their father. In the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we hear each praying in his own voice.

In the end, though, Jesus asks us to take a larger view than any one character offers. He asks us to strive for a view from above that allows us to see the patterns that a close-up view might miss. A story about a disobedient son who squanders his father’s fortune becomes a story about the joy of finding what was lost and restoring to life what we thought was broken beyond repair. A story about a man who thanks God that he is not a sinner and a tax collector who prays for mercy turns out to be a story about the humbling of the exalted and the exaltation of the humble. Over and over again, Jesus tells a story about characters we think we know and then turns it all upside down.

### Can we step back from particular stories to see a larger pattern?

*Captain Phillips* is a devastating film because the possibility of turning everything upside down seems so remote. All the characters appear trapped in their roles by forces larger than they are, and everyone moves toward a conclusion that, even though it feels inevitable, is nevertheless shocking. The larger story that the view from above accentuates—of the interdependence of power and desperation, wealth and poverty, globalization and despair—is so powerful that it feels as if no other ending could be written.

But that’s not the only story. The pattern revealed by an encompassing view of creation is not finally defined by economic systems. It is defined by shared human vulnerability and God’s desire that we be not at each other’s mercy, but in each other’s care. That is a story worth telling, powerful enough to change the endings of the world’s tales.

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*Stephanie Paulsell is a professor of the practice of ministry studies at Harvard Divinity School.*

# IN Review

## How we got here

by Heath W. Carter

Eager to reassure a shaken public, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stretched the truth when he averred in his first inaugural address, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." In reality, there was good reason to be afraid. The world economy remained in the deepest of doldrums, and societies across the globe were turning to dictators for answers. By the time Roosevelt assumed office on March 4, 1933, Hirohito, Mussolini and Stalin were already ruling with iron fists; and not three weeks later the Reichstag invested the power of the German state in Chancellor Adolf Hitler. Were liberal democracies ill equipped to manage a crisis of such magnitude? It was a genuine question, as Ira Katznelson underscores in this important and engrossing book.

Katznelson argues that the New Deal is what pulled the world back from the brink. To be clear, when Katznelson refers to the New Deal he does not have in mind just the alphabet soup of new federal agencies. He means the whole of U.S. policy, both foreign and domestic, in the era stretching from the election of FDR to the end of the Truman years.

While his period covers presidential administrations, his story revolves around Congress. It was the country's lawmakers, Katznelson contends, who proved that representative government could weather the worst of storms. As they seized the reins of the domestic economy and authorized new crusades abroad, legislators transformed both the nation and the world. The New Deal they enacted was a historical watershed "almost on a par with . . . the French Revolution."

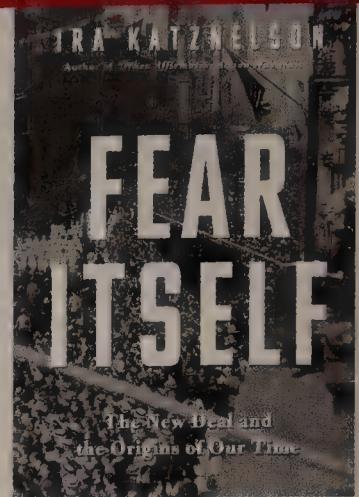
Yet this book is no homage. While

insisting on the New Deal's paramount significance, Katznelson also stresses its profound ambiguities. Many of these sprang from a "southern cage." As he persuasively shows, the congregational delegation from the Jim Crow South wielded unmatched legislative clout throughout this era. Strong in numbers and fiercely devoted to segregation, this disciplined bloc could effectively veto any initiative.

On the domestic front, the implications for the shape of American capitalism were huge. Throughout the New Deal's early and most radical phase, southern legislators were confident in the stability of the racial order and therefore had few qualms about expanding federal oversight of the economy, though they did take care to ensure that agricultural and domestic sectors that employed disproportionate numbers of African-American workers were excluded from new regulations.

By the 1940s, however, a number of factors had conspired to put Jim Crow on less sturdy footing, so its southern proponents reverted to a defensive mode. The more focused they became on preserving regional autonomy, the more they perceived enemies where they had once seen friends. In a number of the decade's most important legislative battles, they championed legislation that weakened organized labor and demolished the federal role in economic planning.

The impact of their revolt remains with us to this day. Had the South voted differently or simply had fewer votes, Katznelson suggests, the United States might have ended up looking more like a European-style social democracy. As it was, the nation exited the New Deal era



### Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time

By Ira Katznelson  
Liveright, 720 pp., \$29.95

with a flagging commitment to the common good.

Dixie's legacy for U.S. foreign policy was no less significant. Throughout these same decades the South doggedly advocated for a more assertive international presence. The region was ready to enter World War II long before the rest of the nation, and it was mainly thanks to the urging of its representatives that rearmament was already under way when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Yet as Katznelson aptly reminds us, the United States went to war not only against totalitarianism but also along with it. In order to defeat the Axis powers the country entered into a robust partnership with a Soviet regime that ranks among the most oppressive in all human history.

By war's end, American hands were covered with blood. The gruesome slaughter of hundreds of thousands of German and Japanese civilians reached its climax with the instant incineration of some 210,000 people at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Katznelson recounts that upon receiving news of the first atom bomb's successful detonation, President Truman reveled, "This is the greatest thing in history."

After the dust of war settled, southern legislators made sure that there would be no retreat into isolationism. Even as they sought to weaken the government at home, they were among the foremost

Heath W. Carter teaches history at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana.

architects of a new "crusading national security state" abroad. Katzenbach astutely observes that the United States "projected might to advance democracy, but, in so doing, it often traduced liberty at home, and promoted authoritarian, often repressive, and sometimes murderous regimes elsewhere." The New Deal was ambiguous indeed.

*Fear Itself* is both stunningly broad and surprisingly narrow in scope. Katzenbach moves deftly between striking anecdotes and incisive analysis, demonstrating along the way his command of both the domestic and international scenes. Yet he never strays far from Capitol Hill. We get little sense here of what was going on at the grassroots level, among the people who sent these legislators to Washington in the first place.

But this is a small complaint about what is truly a masterful work. If you wonder whether politics matter, read this book. More than just a defining history of the New Deal, it is a penetrating look at the origins of our time.

## Sober Mercies: How Love Caught Up with a Christian Drunk

By Heather Kopp

Jericho Books, 224 pp., \$15.00 paperback

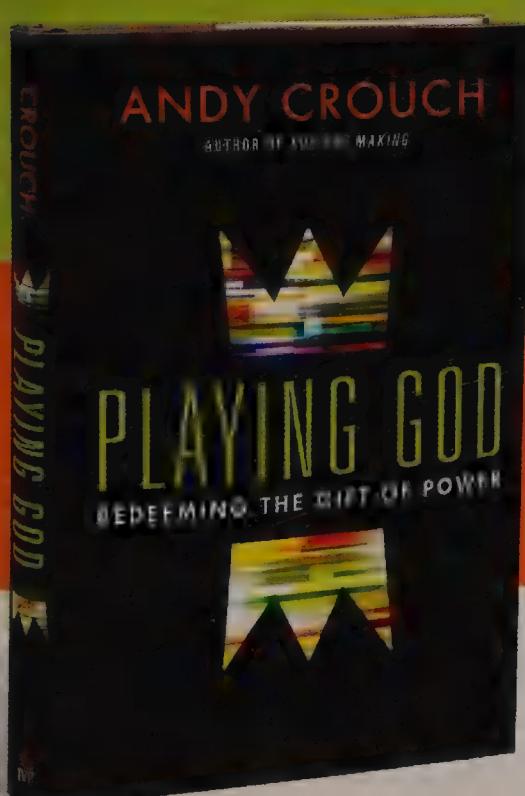
One in four children in the United States grows up in a household with an adult who drinks too much, according to the National Institutes of Health. That means that about seven of my third-grader's classmates experience something akin to what Heather Kopp describes in her recovery memoir. Kopp, who has two children of her own and three stepchildren (all now grown), describes stashing mini wine bottles around the house, drinking herself into oblivion each evening and occasionally driving intoxicated with her children in the car.

Considering the destructiveness of alcoholism, there may be no such thing as too many recovery memoirs. During her own days of addiction, Kopp says, she

read many such memoirs, but in a blog post published immediately before her book was released, Kopp explains how her book differs from the others. In most recovery memoirs, the epiphanic moment in which the addict wakes up to the horror that life has become and starts down the road to recovery occurs toward the end of the book, as the climax. In such narratives, recovery functions as a short and sweet denouement. When she was reading recovery memoirs during her worsening days of addiction, Kopp writes:

I needed to know, what *did* happen next? What happens *after* you quit the drug or the drink or whatever it was you were addicted to? How could a life devoid of one's favorite and most necessary thing be anything but miserable? I needed to read a recovery

Reviewed by Valerie Weaver-Zercher, managing editor for books at Herald Press and author of *Thrill of the Chaste: The Allure of Amish Romance Novels*.

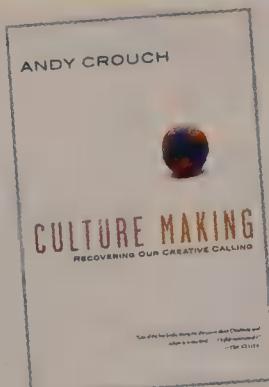


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memoir that was actually about recovery. I was desperate to hear a newly sober person talk about joy. And if possible, to hear from a Christian who had succumbed to addiction, quit, and come out the other side without losing God in the process.

So Kopp intentionally inverted this narrative arc and started her book with an episode she calls the "beginning of the end of my drinking," which involved an undramatic encounter with a guest who, when Kopp opened a bottle of white wine to serve with appetizers, asked, "Do you have any tea?" During the rest of the visit, Kopp felt increasingly sorry for her guest and her liquorless and thus lackluster life. "It was a life of such vast meaninglessness I couldn't wrap my head around it." Kopp has a spot-on way of depicting her prior self-deceptions.

The suspense in Kopp's memoir operates on two levels. She hints at her relapse pages before she narrates it, so the reader is kept wondering when and under what circumstances it will occur and how recovery will look post-relapse. Because she begins her story near the end of her drinking, Kopp can give relapses and their aftermath the space and attention they deserve.

"This time, I didn't have that giddy feeling of making a new start," she writes of the aftermath of relapse. "I didn't have the protective walls of a treatment center. And now, I had planted the idea in the back of my mind that relapse was an option."

Even though the reader anticipates the relapse, Kopp keeps the mechanism of suspense running on more than the question about whether she drinks again. By offering insightful commentary on her

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changing theology and sense of herself, she keeps the reader thirsty for more. We watch her as she watches herself go through the stages of recovery, ugliness not redacted. We watch as she tries to impress her young adult sons with her newly sober and (she hopes) contented, fun-loving self. And we watch as the ego trip of early recovery gets leveled. "I had naively assumed that when I got sober, a better Heather would naturally emerge," she writes. "But clearly alcohol hadn't created my personality flaws, it only exacerbated and magnified them."

For good memoirists of any stripe, suspense is lodged not only in dramatic events but in carefully executed self-revelation. Watching Kopp trace the roots of her addiction does not feel like rubbernecking. Her story contains horrifying episodes that will make readers flinch. But the narrative does not hang on pity or *Schadenfreude* from the unaddicted. Rather, Kopp's struggles with faith, identity and change are universal enough to connect her story to many Christians' experiences.

At points in her recovery, she writes, her Christian faith became a stumbling block that slowed her healing. Initially she imagined that her faith would make her immune to the "gross moral lapse I considered alcoholism to be." But following a divorce and reevaluation of her erstwhile conservative brand of faith, Kopp remarried and became a social drinker. Looking back, she writes, "It was a perfect spiritual storm: a growing cynicism about my faith, guilt about my divorce, and a new affinity for alcohol."

Additionally, Kopp says, even in a newer, more progressive form, her faith offered her little help in coping with her addiction. She remained on what she calls a "prideful intellectual journey aimed at being right about God instead of on a desperate soul journey aimed at being real with God." The difference between those two paths, Kopp claims, "can make you sick."

Whether or not you accept Kopp's cleaving of intellectual and spiritual journeys, she makes an important point: faith and recovery can work at cross-purposes, depending on what form each takes. During her recovery, Kopp shed a kathaphatic approach to faith that emphasized defining and knowing God in favor of an

apophatic one. "The God I thought I knew and understood was not the God who could save me," she writes, again with aching poignancy. "What if I could rediscover God as I didn't understand him—and arrive somewhere closer to the truth?" Ultimately, she discovered that recovering from alcoholism and following Christ don't need to be in conflict: "Like streetlamps lining both sides of the street, they could light my way back to God."

Kopp straddles the debate about whether alcoholism is sin or sickness, refusing to land in either camp. She recalls sitting in Bible studies in which people bristled at the use of the term *disease* for various kinds of addiction, claiming that such a view gave addicts an excuse to sin. Early on in her own treatment process, she defended the idea of alcoholism as sin in a therapy group, only to be challenged by the counselor. "What is it about labeling alcoholism a disease that you object to so much?" he asked, and she later mulled over the interaction. "The more I thought about it, the

more it seemed to me that alcoholism wasn't a matter of sin *or* sickness, but *both*," Kopp writes. "My own experience had proven to me in a way no theory or doctrine ever could that the issue was much more complicated than a single paradigm could explain."

Addicts and ex-addicts will find what Kopp herself was looking for when she was still in the throes of sin-sickness: a dramatic story not only of addiction but of recovery, and of how one alcoholic found life on the other side to be anything but miserable. Nonaddicts will find a narrative that makes them both grateful for their placid if somewhat boring lives and that reminds them of the milder habits that can still separate them from God. Both types of readers, if they are paying attention, will find prose that connects to their own histories and their faith.

"I don't care what people say," Kopp writes, describing the catharsis of reading her drinking history aloud to a friend, "you can get saved so many more times than once."

## BookMarks

### Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography

By Richard Rodriguez  
Viking, 256 pp., \$26.95

After 9/11 Rodriguez was determined to learn more about the religion that purportedly inspired the terrorists who engineered the attacks. In his explorations he came to realize that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share more than a patriarch and matriarch: all three are desert religions. The nature of desert religion is the theme that unites these otherwise very disparate essays. Rodriguez is a master stylist with a probing mind. He asks questions that make a reader pause and reflect. He ranges from popular culture to memories of his youth, from Lance Armstrong to Elvis Presley.

### Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World

By Shirley Hershey Showalter  
Herald Press, 309 pp., \$15.99 paperback

Showalter grew up with a love of the land and an appreciation for the Mennonite faith in which she was reared, but there was no way she could be kept down on the farm. Aspirations for the "glittering world" and a love for literature and writing led her eventually to become a college professor, college president and foundation executive. In this memoir of her childhood she weaves together stories of family tension involving her father and grandfather over inheritance, of her mother's unfulfilled ambitions as a writer, of her conflicts with the conservative boundaries of her church, and of the rewards of teaching. The reader might guess from Showalter's teenage confrontation with her stern bishop that she would go far in life. Yet she has never drifted away from the faith and family that nurtured her, even while living out her ambitions as a scholar, leader and writer.

# Wilderness Blessings

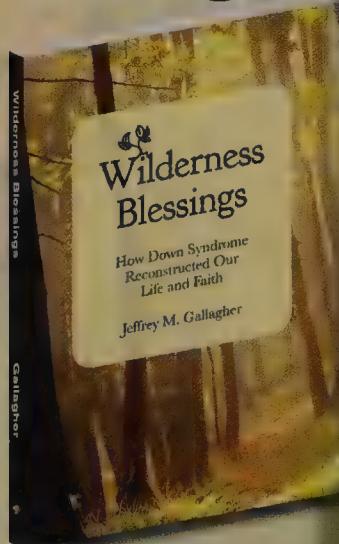
## How Down Syndrome Reconstructed Our Life and Faith by Jeffrey M. Gallagher

*Wilderness Blessings: How Down Syndrome Reconstructed Our Life and Faith* takes us through the first year of Jacob Gallagher's life viewed through the eyes of his father, pastor Jeff Gallagher. Jacob's uncertain birth, trying surgeries, and first year of living with Down syndrome helped Jeff reflect honestly and candidly on disability theology, God's place in tragedy and hardship, how the church welcomes (or not) people with differing abilities, and the joys—the wilderness blessings—that Jacob's life has given his family.

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## Crippling fantasies

**J**oseph Gordon-Levitt wrote, directed and plays the title role in *Don Jon*, a film about a young man who earned his nickname through his polished routine of bedding beautiful women. But Jon also spends hours online looking at pornography, and he admits that he prefers pornography to sex with actual women.

Jon's routine is predictably interrupted when he meets Barbara, played by Scarlett Johansson. Barbara is not about to fall into bed with Jon. She withholds sex and uses it as a tool to shape Jon into her perfect boyfriend.

But the film veers away from being a romantic comedy: *Don Jon* is not about a pornography addict saved by a good

woman. It's about the unhealthy collision of two people who are ready only for severely broken relationships. Jon's addiction to pornography crashes into the ideals of a pampered princess; Barbara, like Jon, seems unable to grapple with reality.

Pitch-perfect performances by Gordon-Levitt and Johansson keep the film off the soapbox. Jon is enraptured by Barbara until she finally gets into his bed, after which he is immediately drawn back to pornography. Barbara likewise cannot love the actual Jon; instead, she loves an image of him that coincides with an image of herself.

The film portrays a world drenched in digital escapes from reality. As Jon

searches for just the right clip, where he can sort his escapist preferences by hair color and cup size, his grip on reality and his capacity for love diminishes.

The film offers insight into the bleakness of a fantasy world that is present not only in pornography but also in manifold other areas of life, including the romance movies Barbara adores—movies that Jon disdains because they are not real. “Everyone knows it’s fake, but they watch it like it’s real life,” he says, unaware of how this insight applies to his own life.

The emptiness of a fake world is present in the over-the-top princess birthday party that Barbara’s family throws for a little girl and in Jon’s routine at the gym,

PHOTO BY DANIEL MCFADDEN. © 2013 RELATIVITY MEDIA, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



**DAZZLING IMAGES:** Porn addict Jon (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) meets Barbara (Scarlett Johansson), who tries to shape him into her Prince Charming.

where he grits his teeth, reciting lines of the Lord's Prayer as he seeks to make his body into something women will desire.

Jon's isolation is present even in his friendships, which revolve around alcohol and pickups. Jon loves his family but scarcely communicates with them: his sister sits mute, bound to her cell phone, and Sunday dinners at his parents' house after church involve watching football games on the big screen TV instead of family connections.

This isolation extends to Jon's connection to church, portrayed here as ethnic, working-class Catholic. Jon never fails to show up at church to sit next to his family, but church never connects to his humanity and his need.

Redemption comes when Jon discovers a way of being in relationship that does not flinch from reciprocity and vulnerability. Other areas of his life are redeemed as well. He goes to the gym and skips the weight room in favor of a basketball game. He spends time with his friends at a pizza place instead of a bar. His sister finally puts down her cell phone to affirm the changes in Jon's life. His parents speak a bit of truth, too, and the television gets turned off.

The one area of life that seems untouched by Jon's redemption is church. When Jon goes to confession and does not provide his usual report on using pornography but instead reveals with some enthusiasm that he has changed, he is assigned the same penance as always. Jon's plea for the priest to explain how he comes up with the number of Hail Marys and Our Fathers to recite goes unanswered.

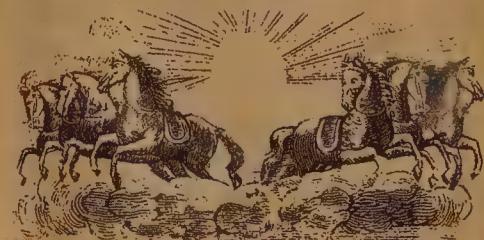
*Don Jon* diagnoses the epidemic of pornography as a symptom of diseased relationships in a world that privileges polished images over human truths, a world in which human bodies are sacrificed on the altar of consumer capitalism. Though Jon's church has nothing to say to this world, the church of Jesus Christ has a lot to say to it—and it has an alternative vision of bodies as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1) to God that brings healing, life and relationship.

Reviewed by Beth Felker Jones, who teaches at Wheaton College.

# ON Music

## MANDOLIN ORANGE

THIS SIDE OF JORDAN



### This Side of Jordan

Mandolin Orange  
[Yep Roc]

**A**nother day, another talented Americana songwriter immersed in the language of a faith he doesn't profess. Andrew Marlin, half of the North Carolina duo Mandolin Orange, is a church musician's son who no longer identifies with the church. But as he's explained it, Christianity remains his vocabulary for speaking of spiritual things.

Right from the title, the duo's third record presents its lyrical vision as an alternative to the otherworldly religiosity of old-time gospel. About a minute into the first song, "House of Stone," Emily Frantz's voice joins Marlin's for the first time: "Now some may sing the sounds of 'hallelujah' / And dream about a mansion of gold / But . . . my dreams all are resting on a house of stone." Mine too, and I dream those dreams in Christian community. Marlin's life-affirming lyrics make me want to invite him to church, or at least send him a Wendell Berry book or something.

But first I just want to listen to him and Frantz play and sing together. Mostly he plays guitar and she plays fiddle; sometimes he picks up a mandolin and she covers guitar. Both play with the understated competence of legit pickers who aren't there to show off. And they get around on not just different instruments but different styles—country gospel, old time, modern folk, gentle nods toward bluegrass and honky-tonk.

Holding it all together are a baritone

and an alto that fit just so. Frantz has mentioned the issue of being pigeonholed as a "guy-girl duo." But it's hard to hear Mandolin Orange as a take on the flashy old Nashville duet acts, or even as something akin to Gillian Welch and David Rawling's coed take on the "brother band" tradition of close harmony so well blended you're not always sure who's who. Marlin and Frantz don't really sound alike—his voice is reedy and slightly gritty, hers straightforward and pure—and their harmonies aren't always close. But they sing alike: there's a honed sensitivity to each other and to the material.

Sometimes there's a third voice—Ryan Gustafson, who also adds subtle electric guitar. Upright bass, drums, piano and pedal steel round out the sound. But it's a duo record with backup, not a band record—even at full tilt, the arrangements and mix favor Marlin and Frantz.

Marlin's song forms and melodies sometimes ramble a bit. But elsewhere the writing is punchy and sharp. Frantz sings lead on the best one, "The Doorman," a slow, lush melody over a lazily swung beat. The tune and lyrics of "Cavalry" give it a touch of the epic folk ballad—balanced by the arrangement's string-band simplicity and Marlin's understated singing. "Waltz About Whiskey" is fun, a self-consciously country song about lost love and a jukebox. And the ambitious "Hey Adam" is sung from the perspective of a closeted gay man's compassionate secret lover: "Please hear these words: Our father loves you always."

Come to think of it, we may have to do "Hey Adam" at my church. Whatever

its creators' religious commitments, this is a lovely and faithful record.

### Beautiful Africa

Rokia Traoré  
(Nonesuch)

### The Invisible Girl

Parov Stelar Trio  
(Etage Noir)

### The Ash & Clay

The Milk Carton Kids  
(ANTI)

Most Americana duos don't sound as much like Gillian Welch and David Rawlings as people say they do. But the Milk Carton Kids' resemblance is uncanny, from the close harmony to the just-guitars sound to the way flatpicker Kenneth Pattengale plays the hell out of a vintage instrument.

As songwriters, Pattengale and Joey Ryan are a click more traditionalist than most of their peers; the word *folk* only needs qualifiers here and there. But there's nothing primitive about the way they sing together: it's as tight and as polished as the Everly Brothers. Their second album isn't much of a departure from the first; they've pretty much got this formula down pat. What a great formula.

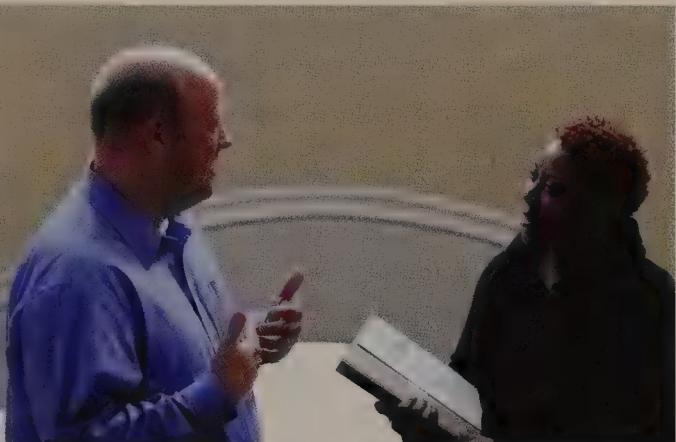
Malian singer, songwriter, and guitarist Rokia Traoré has long blended West African music with occidental influences. Her fifth album, produced by P. J. Harvey collaborator John Parish, features the strongest rock element yet. The tracks are built on static, riff-driven grooves, above which Traoré's inventive vocal melodies dart and play—often joined by the West African stringed *n'goni*. The effect is surprising and delightful.

As a singer, Traoré conveys an array of emotions—in three different languages. The most intense song is the title track, an up-tempo lament for a homeland torn from within and without. Perhaps not coincidentally, the politically charged song is one of just two that include some English lyrics: "Battered, wounded Africa / Why do you keep the role of the beautiful naive deceived?"

The best hyphenated genres don't combine disparate worlds; they embrace commonality. Country-rock thrives on earthy simplicity, while folk-pop mines a wealth of timbres both acoustic and electric. Electro-swing may sound like a silly lark. In fact it's a cohesive hybrid that's entirely about dancing, about the timeless power of fascinating rhythm.

On his latest, Austrian DJ and electro-swing pioneer Parov Stelar creates compelling tracks, with the help of two horn players. "Doctor Foo" and "The Fireface" layer big band-era horn lines over four-on-the-floor club beats, while "La Divina" takes a loungey ballad and turns it into trip-hop. Elsewhere Stelar strays farther, drawing from soul and hard jazz. But the electro-swing theme is always nearby; even the funky "At the Flamingo Bar" begins with the audacious sound of a looped standup bass.

Do you feel  
a call to  
help pastors  
find their  
way forward?



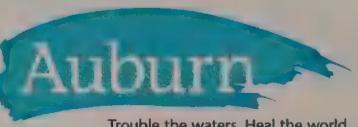
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### My True Story

Aaron Neville  
(Blue Note)

Now in his seventies, Aaron Neville can still locate the incredibly sweet spot between full voice and falsetto. The R&B legend's singing remains mellow but quietly forceful—as if he could let loose at any moment but chooses not to. He just sounds great.

*My True Story* is a collection of doo-wop covers, taking Neville back to one of several musical strains that formed him. Doo-wop was formative for lots of musicians, black and white alike. Enter Keith Richards, the British rock star who, decades ago, loudly embraced rock 'n' roll's African-American backstory while Stateside rockers were mostly erasing it. Richards is the coproducer (with Don Was) and guitarist-bandleader here, and he approaches the material like a reverent fan. The crack band is similarly conservative, and why not? The songs are classic, the singer peerless. No new ground needed here.

—Steve Thorngate

by Philip Jenkins

**S**top me if you've heard this story before. It's about an ancient church with a near monopoly of religious practice and a stunning tradition of artistic achievement. Ordinary people love the church as a symbol of holiness and cultural identity, but most have little idea of what it actually teaches. The church uses a language unknown beyond the clergy, so religious services are incomprehensible. Even so, lay believers enter enthusiastically into the church's well-established traditions, its pilgrimages and devotions, its popular cults of saints, martyrs and angels. And then suddenly a few daring activists start putting the Bible into the familiar language of everyday speech. As the laity delve into the Bible's pages, a revolution begins ...

Although I could be describing Catholic Europe around 1520, every word also applies to the recent history of Christianity in Ethiopia, a land that became Christian even before the Roman Empire did. Through most of its history, the mainstream national faith was the Tewahedo ("One-ness") Church, or Ethiopian Orthodox. This highly traditional body is strongly liturgical in orientation, with a clearly defined clergy. Services are conducted in the language of Ge'ez, which was the main tongue of the early medieval kingdom of Aksum. Apart from being incomprehensible, the liturgies are very lengthy,

## Reformation in Ethiopia

lasting multiple hours—and sometimes days.

Like Europe's medieval Catholic Church, the Orthodox faith penetrates every aspect of life and behavior. Yet however passionate in their commitment, laypeople are limited in what they can learn from the liturgy. Outside the churches, Ge'ez is extinct and has been replaced by Amharic as Ethiopia's lingua franca.

Not until the 19th century was the Bible translated into Amharic. It was done through the heroic work of a mysterious figure called Abu Rumi, who was probably an Orthodox monk. By the end of that century, that Bible was starting to reshape the faith, sparking revival movements.

Even more remarkable was the work of Onesimos Nesib. Born to the Oromo people, Onesimos was enslaved as a child but was liberated by Swedish missionaries, who educated him. He dedicated himself to translating the Bible into Oromo, aided by another freed slave, a woman called Aster Ganno. (Not surprisingly perhaps, given historical prejudices, Onesimos has usually received all the credit for this work.)

So by the end of the 19th century Ethiopians had the Bible in the national language and in Oromo, the language of

a third of the nation. Until the 1970s, these new resources had some impact, but they were constrained by the firm Orthodoxy of the church and the royal regime.

In 1974, however, the old order crumbled in the face of a communist coup, led by a military council or soviet, the Derg. A viciously repressive and antireligious regime remained in power until 1991, causing outside observers to ask whether Christianity would survive. Only with the fall of communism was it finally possible to see what battered remnants of the old faith might endure.

As it turned out, much more than remnants remained. The churches were in fact doing very well indeed, and some boomed during the repression. Today, in a country with 93 million people, 40 million still adhere to the Tewahedo Church, and another 32 million are Muslims. The real surprise, though, is the number of Protestants, who were a very marginal presence before 1974. They are now 17 million strong, around 18 percent of the population, and multiplying fast.

Since the 1970s, Ethiopia has enjoyed something very much like the Protestant Reformation, a movement based largely on increasing popular

access to the vernacular Bible. One successful body is the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, EECMY, which is Lutheran—appropriately enough, given the historical parallels to Luther's own day. Originating among foreign missionary bodies, the church achieved its independence in 1969, only a few years before the revolution. However, it developed firm roots, particularly among the Oromo people, thanks to Onesimos and Aster. Since the 1960s, EECMY has grown from a few thousand baptized members to some 5.5 million.

The Mekane Yesus Church is by no means the only force in the Protestant expansion. Even larger is the Kale Heywet (Word of Life) charismatic church, a Bible-centered group with 6.5 million members. Smaller groups include the Meserete Kristos (Christ Is the Foundation), which is Mennonite. Impossible to count precisely are the congregations of the thriving but diffuse Mulu Wongel (Full Gospel) Church. Mulu Wongel's main congregation in Addis Ababa is one of Africa's largest megachurches.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live through the Reformation? In Ethiopia, you can see a version firsthand.

*Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.*

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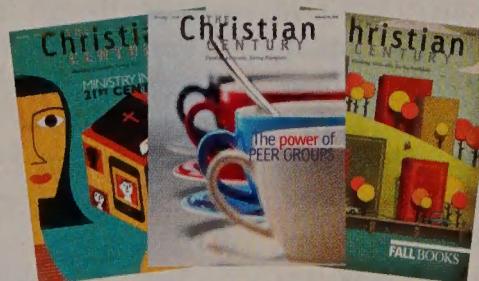
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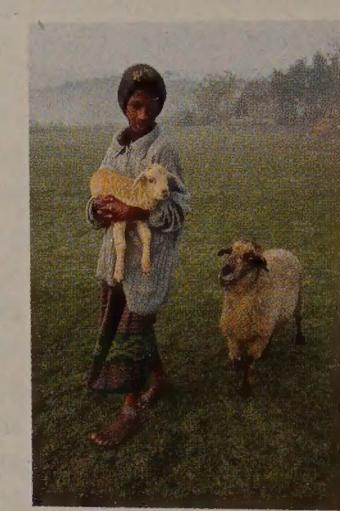
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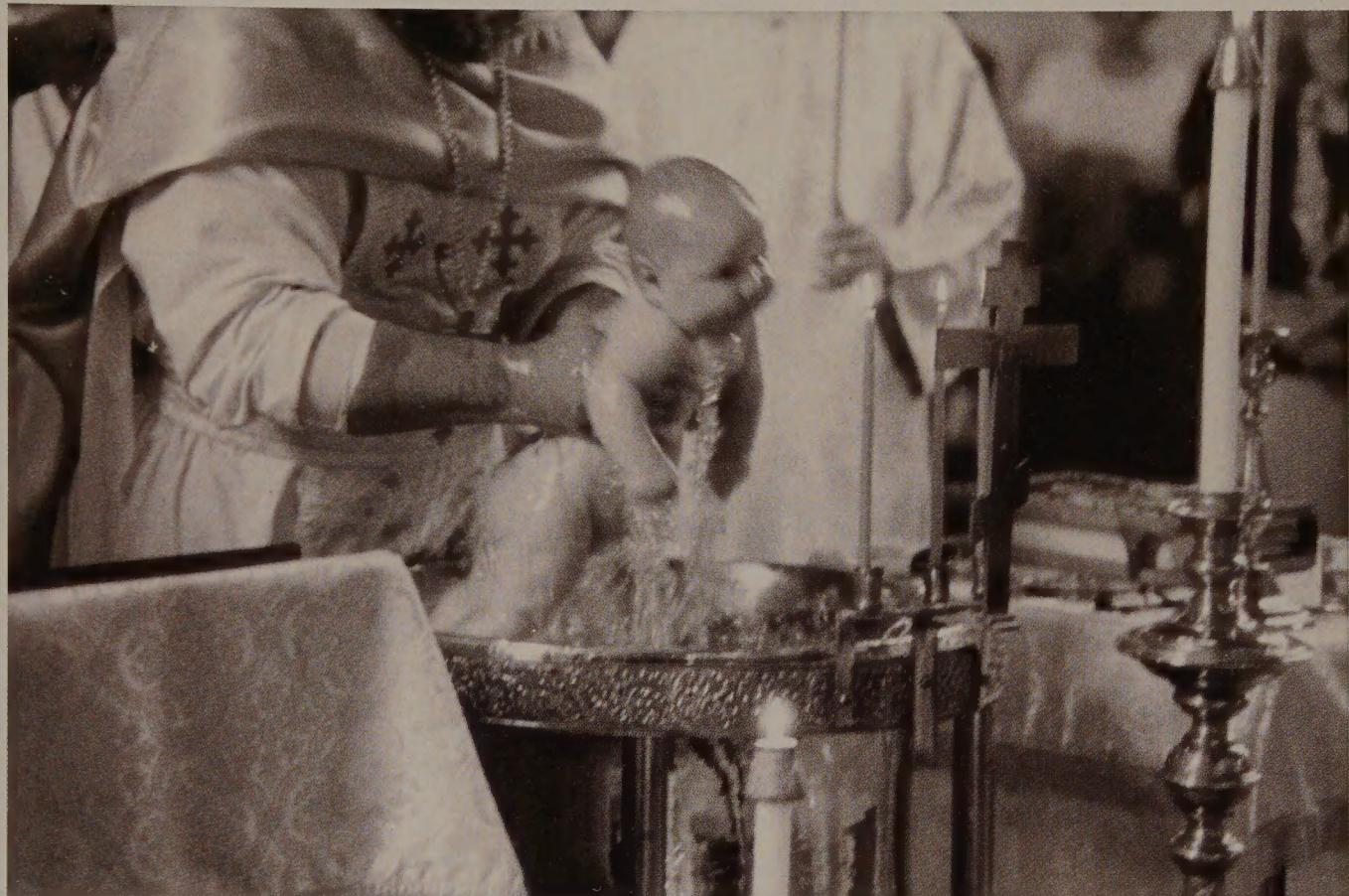
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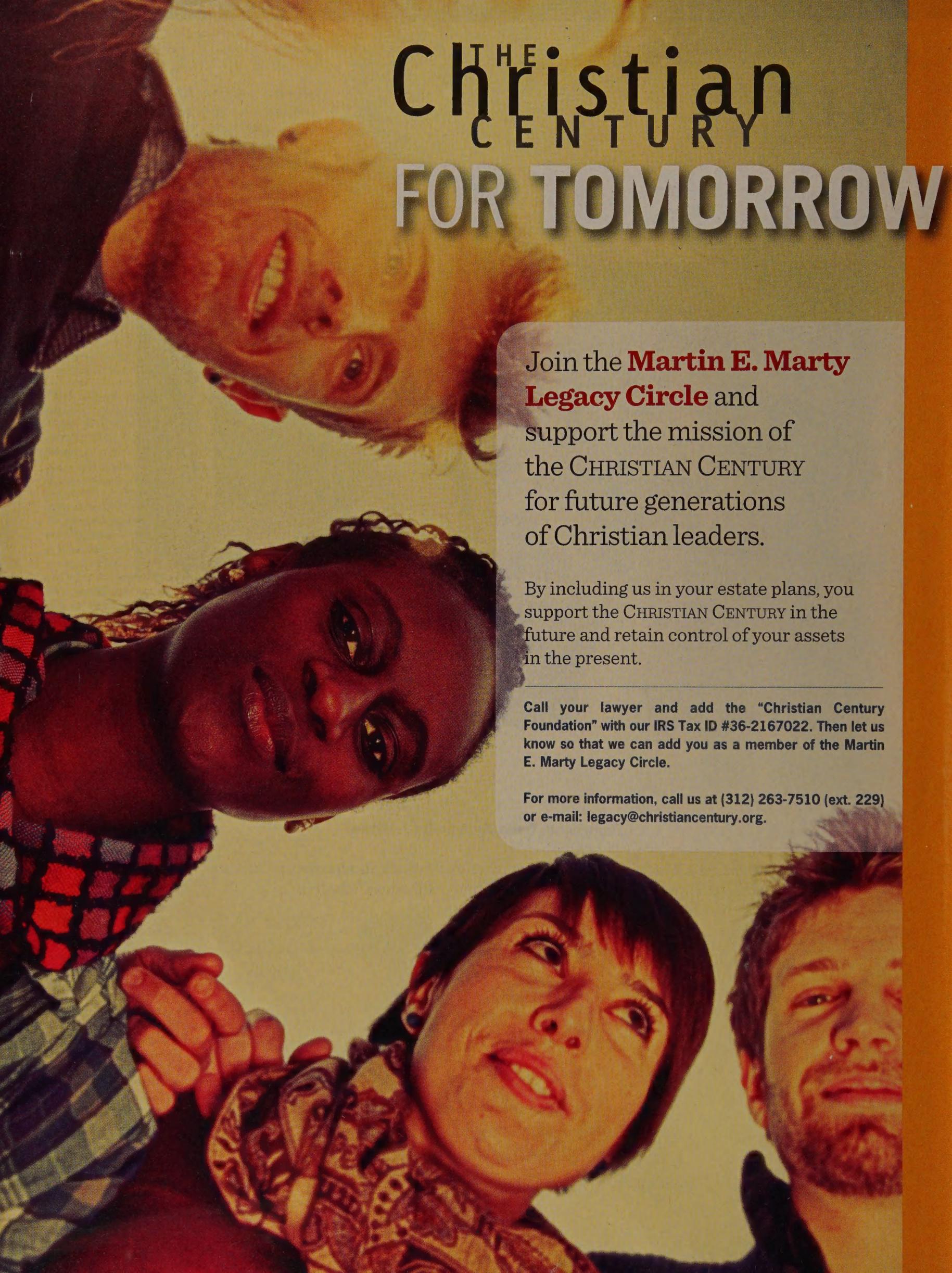


**Baptism of Xenia, by Jennifer J. Wilson**

Jennifer J. Wilson, a Boston photographer, worked on a documentary project centered on parish life at the city's Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral.

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*Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor in Boston.*



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